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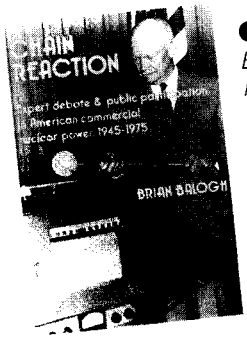

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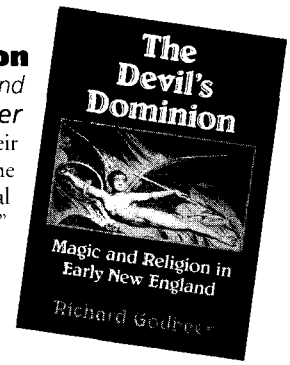

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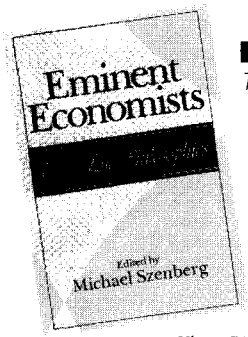

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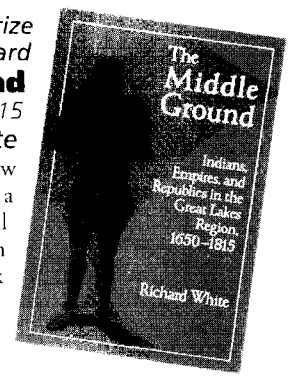

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Whaddya Drivin'?

ARISTIDES

"Ari," said my old friend Willy Stein, as he accompanied me to my gray, one-year-old 1973 Volvo at the close of a summer night on which we had met with two other fellows to play in a moderately high-stakes gin-rummy game, "Ari," he said, pointing to my car, "you got air in this shit-box?" I did in fact have air-conditioning—"factory air," as they say on the used-car lot—in the Volvo, but the remark, I had to confess, took the air out of me. I was rather fond of this Volvo. Willy himself drove a new, long white Cadillac, Sedan DeVille, and had begun driving Cadillacs soon after he had dropped out of college and gone into his father's business. One of the other players, a commodities-market guy, had arrived in a tan Mercedes sedan; and the fourth member of our party drove a sleek black Lincoln. Willy's remark suggested that the Volvo might have belonged to one of my kids, or was a car of the kind that one bought used for a plain and undemanding wife in whom one was clearly no longer much interested. I drove the Volvo home that night with the air-conditioning all the way up, listening to the *Eroica* Symphony on FM radio, speeding down the expressway, getting as much pleasure out of it as I could. But, after Willy's remark, I have to confess that I never quite felt the same about it.

I have for all my adult days—with lapses I shall get to presently—been committed to modesty in automobiles. I grew up in a home where the family car was for much of my boyhood a Buick or an Oldsmobile, never top of the line, with a deviation for a Hudson (a Hudson Hornet, to give the machine its hopeless sobriquet) in the early fifties and, at one point, a few Cadillacs leased in the name of my father's business. My father's interest in cars was so negligible that I can remember his once being asked, by a parking-lot attendant, what color his car was and his not being able to come up with the answer. Although I admired that almost Olympian unconcern about details, I myself have only been able to pretend to have such indifference.

While maintaining, lo, these many years, an impressively pristine ignorance about what causes cars to run, I have always been very attentive to what you might call their social ramifications. I can account for my own commitment to modest cars only through snobbery; I should have said simple snobbery, except that in my case what is entailed is reverse snobbery, which is a bit more complicated but in the end comes to the same thing. Since a handsome car is perhaps the most obvious sign of having done well in the world—a sign, moreover, available to a great many people, too many if the truth be known—the reverse snob looks elsewhere for his status. To drive the fine car, in this scheme, becomes rather infra dig. Your reverse snob goes instead for the dull, in some cases even the drab, car, and is thus able secretly to look down upon the fellow in the grander car.

I recall once being in the garage of a building of costly condominium apartments in Hyde Park near the University of Chicago. The building was lived in chiefly by senior professors at the university, many of them professors of law and medicine and of other subjects that made impressive consulting fees available to them. The quality of the cars in that garage—lots of older Volkswagens, Volvos, run-down Saabs, Dodges, an occasional Ford station wagon—was quite out of proportion to the expensiveness of the apartments above. I asked the man I was with about this obvious discrepancy. "Academic motors," he said, with a worldly shrug, "what do you expect?" Something to it, I'm afraid.

Cars have been important to me for as long

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as I can remember. When I was five years old, our family took an apartment on Sheridan Road in Chicago. Sheridan Road, now as then, is a four-lane thoroughfare, with a regular stream of traffic whirring by at almost all times. Ours was a small apartment in a deep courtyard building, and my bedroom window faced the street. After being sent to bed, I can recall kneeling at the window, watching the cars go by, and, doing an automotive version of counting sheep, telling myself that I would go back to bed when, say, twenty Packards, or twenty-five DeSotos, or thirty Plymouths had gone by. Knowledge of cars was the first knowledge I was able to organize, preceding baseball statistics, which was the second. I was able to recognize different makes by their varying grills and hood ornaments and, in some cases, by their differing body shapes. I was aided in my comprehension by World War II, during which new cars were not manufactured, and so, for once, knowledge had stood perfectly still to allow a little boy to store it away. I remember being extremely pleased that I had something close to mastery over a field of knowledge, however small and insignificant the field might be. Here was something I knew, and knew cold. I am not sure that I have ever known anything else quite so well since.

My family always had a car, and many of our vacations—most of them to Canada, where my father was born and still had relatives—were made by car. Expressways were not yet in business; and, though passing through small towns and cities was mildly interesting, for the most part I remember those nine-hundred-mile drives to Montreal and the Laurentian mountains as mildly boring. During the war years, we would sometimes pick up hitchhiking servicemen, as soldiers and sailors were then called, and at night we would often stay in private homes that had tourist rooms to le' There was an atmosphere of trust in the country then that is unfortunately now long gone. Think, for example, of the old traveling salesman jokes. Impossible today. What farmer—or anyone else—would let a stranger in his home? Besides, the salesman himself is probably flying these days and staying at Holiday Inns, and would probably be quite as wary of the farmer as the farmer would be of him.

Cars became immensely—make that intensely—interesting when I arrived at early adolescence. I was an adolescent under the ancien régime—before, that is, organized play, psychological understanding, and the birth-control pill came into existence. In exchange for these—how shall I call them—little conveniences, we were allowed to drive cars young and were given a fair measure of freedom by parents who, never having heard of such words as *nurturing*, did not cloyingly hover over us. A pretty fair exchange, or so I have come to believe. In Chicago, when I was growing up there, a kid could get a driver's license at fifteen. (There used to be stories about farm kids driving when they were twelve or thirteen.) A driver's license was the great document of one's youth. It set one free from the confines of one's village, as neighborhoods in Chicago then seemed, and provided a passport to the larger world of the enticing and not yet menacing city. In those days in Chicago, when one obtained a driver's license, one was told immediately to place a five-dollar bill between it and the window in one's wallet. The purpose of this finsky was to have it at the ready so that any cop who might stop one for any of a hundred little traffic violations could take it and pay himself off if he chose. A driver's license, more than anything else, marked one's passage into early adulthood.

Another little convenience we missed was the high school course called Driver's Education. Our fathers generally taught us how to drive, or perhaps a friend did; a few kids took lessons at driving schools. My father attempted to teach me one day in the bulky Hudson, which had a manual transmission and a most delicate clutch. It was no go, in every sense of the word, for as I let out the clutch, the odious Hudson lurched forward and the motor sputtered, fluttered, and died. My father's patience, for reasons unknown to me, was on empty that day, so after six or seven such lurches, we agreed to try it another day. As it turned out, we never had to do so.

A week or so later, I was in the car of an older friend, who wanted to visit his girlfriend on the sly, and thus didn't want his car, which was distinctive—it was the current year's two-tone green Chevy, hardtop convertible, with automatic transmission—seen parked in front of her house. He asked me if I would mind driving it around for a couple of hours and picking him up a few blocks away. I said I would be glad to. What he didn't ask me was

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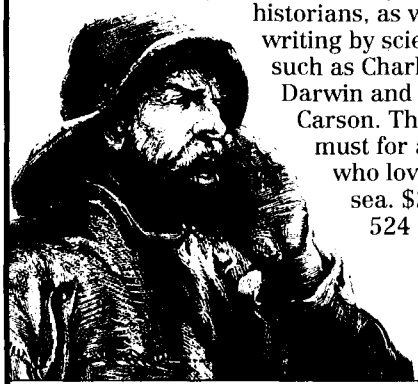

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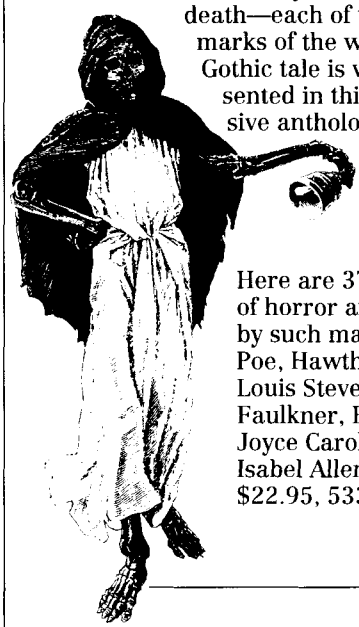

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whether I knew how to drive. I learned that afternoon, teaching myself, driving around quiet residential streets.

Not long after that my father took me to get my license. It was a rainy weekday morning. A man with the fine figure of a Chicago political hack—pallid, paunchy, ready to doze—after waiting half an hour or so for the rain to subside, said, "Hell, the kid looks like he can drive," and promptly issued me my license without an examination. My father, in thanks, gave him a little something extra for his lunch along with the fee for the license. The driver's license in my wallet, the five-dollar bill betwixt it and the plastic window containing it, I felt like crying out "I am free!" in imitation of some stagey plantation slave in *Gone with the Wind*, "Lordy be, I am free!" And, the fact is, I was free, or at least freer than I had hitherto been to roam the city and sample its hidden delights.

Although I have never had a car accident (touch wood), I do not consider myself a particularly good driver. I was from the beginning, and grow even more toward the end, a bit dreamy behind the wheel. I like to have the radio or, more recently, tape deck going, usually playing classical music, and sometimes I listen to a baseball game. The scene passes, my mind floats on clouds of fantasy, calling up phrases or formulating sentences for essays or stories I am writing or planning to write, imagining lives I shall never live. Even as a boy, I was never greatly enamored of speed—it wasn't my idea of a good time, and anyway I always found other ways of showing off—and never drag raced or played the horrific game called "Chicken," in which two cars came at each other head-on until one or the other chickened out and turned away from a certain collision.

Once, during a summer when I was a college student, while driving back in the early morning after visiting a girlfriend who was a camp counselor in Michigan, despite deluging myself with coffee and Pepsi-Cola, and pouring cold water over my wrists at gas stations, I fell asleep at the wheel on the Outer Drive in Chicago in my mother's car, a red and black Plymouth Belvedere with push-button automatic drive. I awoke to find myself driving into oncoming morning-rush-hour traffic, which certainly got my attention. When I managed to get back on the right side of the median, I thought there was something wrong with the steering wheel, so violently was it shaking. It turned out that it was my hands that were shaking. Later I discovered that all four tires were destroyed by the hop over the median. Naturally, I lied to my parents about what might have caused such damage, mumbling some nonsense about young vandals being much on the prowl in the part of Michigan I had visited. They didn't for a moment believe me, but in their kindness neither did they press me. Another small item for which I owe them.

My friend Robert Ginsburg drove splendidly. As others can swear or paint or play the cello, he drove—with authority. Had I ever planned bank robberies or perfect crimes requiring a getaway car, Robert would have been my driver. There was a steadiness about his driving and a smoothness. Gunning the engine lightly, he would zip without hesitation through a narrow opening in an alley, or smoothly slide into what seemed an impossibly small parking space, or run nearly a full block in reverse without—hey, no sweat—showing the least strain. Behind the wheel he could, as they say about superior infielders in baseball, really pick it. In college one summer he had a date with an attractive young woman named Karen Black, who later went on to become a Hollywood actress. How did it go? I remember asking him. Did she say anything interesting? "'You drive well,' she told me," he replied. I have remembered it all these years because the line still sounds like something written by Hemingway for *Road & Track*.

Robert tooled around in a gunmetal gray 1950 Chevy coupe with standard transmission and plaid seat covers that had a lot of green running through them. I must have clocked forty or so thousand miles with him in that car, and I cannot recall the least breakdown, not even a flat tire. It wasn't Robert's own car—it was a family car—but he had fairly frequent use of it. I saw a great deal of the world from the window and backseat of that car when I was between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. If I had that car in my possession today, I would bronze it, the way people used to bronze their children's baby shoes, and tell people it is a piece of contemporary sculpture.

Part of the lore of my adolescence had kids owning their own beat-up old cars, or jalopies as they were then called—a word for which *Webster's* says the origin is uncertain—or

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"beaters" as they are called today. I did not own my own car in high school or in college. The first car I owned was a more-than-ten-year-old green Ford, which, just before my discharge from the army, I bought for $200 to transport me from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and thence to Chicago. It got the job done, and I sold it soon after. The only time since then that I have not owned a car is when I lived, in the early 1960s, in New York. Even then owning a car in New York was more burdensome than pleasurable, at least if one lived on short financial rations. But I felt the want of a car. I grew up in a car city, where the only reason for not owning a car was that you couldn't afford one. Without a car I felt like a cowboy without a horse, a sailor dry-docked—less complete, less happy, less free. "In America," a Havoline Motor Oil commercial begins, "your car is not just something you own. It's part of your life." It's only a commercial, I know, and even rather a loathsome one, but I fear that, in my case at least, there's something to it.

As a middlewesterner, I am sometimes surprised at the number of "muh fella Americuns," as Lyndon Johnson used to say, middle-class ones, I run into who do not drive. Driving seems to be one of those activities best learned when young and, usually, not easily learned when older. For a long spell, women did not drive, though this changed not long after World War II. I remember being proud of my mother, who first began driving in her forties and who turned out to be a very good driver. A number of men I know who don't drive are now in their seventies and eighties, and were the sons of poor immigrants who did not have the money for so grand a luxury as a car. When these men came into adulthood, they faced the Depression and so couldn't afford a car themselves. They have learned to make do with taxis, wives who drive, friends who chauffeur them around, or mass transit. Perhaps the most notable case in recent modern literature of a non-driver is that of Edmund Wilson. "The Bunny," as Karl Shapiro refers to him, always adding that somehow deflationary definite article, found nothing at all odd about stepping into a cab in Manhattan and instructing the shocked driver to take him to Martha's Vineyard. It was owing to such habits that Wilson's father made sure that he never came into his inheritance until his, the Bunny's, mother was dead.

American car culture par excellence, in my experience, is to be found in the South. In the South, not only was every man expected to know a great deal about cars, but he was expected to know how to fix his own cars. Since the southern climate is gentler on cars, people tended to keep them longer and thus needed to repair them more often. I can recall, in the probably vain attempt to pass myself off as a regular guy, listening to southerners talk to me about overhead cams, torque, mag wheels, and Halley four-barrel carburetors, while I tried to keep the franchise-donut glaze out of my eyes and to pretend I knew what the hell they were talking about. I once asked a fellow I worked with in Little Rock if he knew how to replace some kind of bearing in a Chevy, which I then drove. He seemed to think I might have to lift the engine. "How do you do that?" I inquired. "No big deal," he said. "You just get a rope and pulleys, fix 'em to two strong tree branches, and crank her up." I nodded my head, as if to suggest that I should have realized how easy it was. Had I been fool enough to attempt it, I should now, I have no doubt, have been dead for nearly thirty years.

Living in the South, I drove a number of not very sleek used cars. One of them was the Chevy called a Corvair, which gave Ralph Nader his start when he wrote a book about it entitled *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Quite as memorable, though, was an old Cadillac someone sold me that, roughly six weeks after purchase, refused to go in reverse. I seem, as a result, to have done quite a bit of driving around various blocks with it. But the real adventure was buying cars, new or used, in the South, where, apparently, they had never heard of car-salesman jokes. Once I attempted to buy a used Volkswagen bus at a place called—you are going to have to believe me on this—Cliff Packer's Auto Ranch, whose salesmen wore Levi's, checkered shirts, and ten-gallon hats, generally nicely set off with a toothpick in the left corner of the mouth. (I didn't buy the bus because they weren't interested in selling it for cash; the low price was predicated on the profit to be made on financing charges.) At a Mercury agency where I bought something called a Comet, the salesmen wore maroon blazers and carried red canes; they, too, added that elegant, confidence-building touch of the rakishly placed toothpick.

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But even under the best of conditions, I have always found buying cars sheer hell. Too much is at stake. I am not talking about money here. I am talking about self-respect. (Let us not speak of self-esteem, which departs as soon as you hit the door of even the grandest car dealer.) A no-nonsense, leave-a-fellow-his-dignity car salesman is, in my experience, rarer than a Hassid in a red Porsche convertible. A serious drama is going on when one is buying a car, much of it, to avail myself of a feminist term, purely masculinist. I have myself come to think of the activity of dealing with car salesmen as dancing with wolves.

First, while you know that you are never going to win in this transaction, you hope at least to come out of it with your fillings still in your mouth. You hope, that is, to make a deal of a kind that, at least, won't cause your salesman and his fellow highwaymen to laugh about your naïveté together over Scotch and steaks when they meet at the end of the evening. Then, if you can bring this off, you have to hope that your deal is not too much worse than that of any friends who might have bought a similar car. Learning that someone has purchased roughly the same car you have for, say, three thousand dollars less can put tinted glass around your spirit for the life of the car.

Part of the problem is that car salesmen are so damnably confident in their underestimation of your intelligence. The last car I bought before the one I now drive was sold to me by a man with a strange language tic. After every statement of mine, either of fact or inquiry, he said either "Hey, no problem" or "Right." I chose him among salesmen on the floor, you should know, out of sheer prejudice; as a Jewish-surnamed American, he was my co-religionist, and I thought, naively, that he would give me the *emess*, or no-nonsense lowdown. Wrong again. At the end of our introductory colloquy, he allowed that he wasn't interested in what he called "the numbers"—to us incognoscente, the price—but "in finding you a car you are really comfortable with." "Ah, Mr. Pearlman," I announced. "I am the son of a salesman. I have sons who have been salesmen. Please to cut the crap forthwith. Don't worry about my feeling comfortable. It's the numbers we want to concentrate on. They mean everything." What did he reply to this, I had thought air-clearing, remark? What he said was, "Right, no problem." I, for my part, said to myself, "Hey, you gotta love 'em."

To make buying a car a touch more complicated, I note that nowadays every so often women have begun to sell cars. Generally these are rather good-looking women, which can put a clangorous sexual note into the proceedings. I bought my last car from a woman, an impressive woman, as it turned out, a European, who made me feel very little of the standard edginess leading on to full Sturm und Drang, car buyer's division. However, in the middle of our fairly simple negotiations, she received a telephone call from which I could not help but overhear that she was due in divorce court the next day. When I queried her politely about this, she said yes, it was true, then added, "My husband ran off with my best friend." All the way home I thought, what an odd way to put it! I should have thought that your best friend might have run off with your husband. Why did I find this odd? Maybe it's the general paranoia that buying a car induces in a man of normal nervous organization.

Still, despite all these difficulties, I think it likely that, in the field of car buying, I have a good shot at realizing my ambition—perhaps my only perfectly realized ambition, even though a negative one—of never owning a station wagon. As I sink into general physical decay, it's looking better every day. I am told that, as they age, station wagons tend to rattle. But it's the suburbanity of these vehicles that appalls, the sense one has that, once any of its doors is opened, two large dogs, six children, and a vast quantity of gardening equipment will pour out. I knew a man, a bachelor and a sedulous chaser of women, who, because he drove a station wagon, which he needed for his business, always had a difficult time convincing the women he perpetually chased that he was indeed single. Seeing him in that car, I wouldn't believe him myself. The only argument for a station wagon is that of utility. Which has always made the silliest car on the road, in my opinion, a Mercedes station wagon—a piece of comically misplaced luxury, like a diamond-studded lawn mower or a mink briefcase.

Another kind of car I should not want to own, though I have never been in danger here, is a limousine, especially a stretch limousine. If I had the money, I think I should prefer to hire a lighting director than a chauf-

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feur. The picture of a number of stretch limos parked outside a club, as I have seen them parked outside the elegant F Street Club in Washington, is an unpleasant reminder of plutocracy. In Washington, certain government jobs have the added status of having a car and driver go with them. ("Never take a job with a car and driver," Malcolm Muggeridge told the journalist Paul Johnson. "When you lose it, that's what you'll miss most.") Now that there are so many livery services, and airports are practically clogged with stretch limos, every man can be a plutocrat for an hour or two. Not every man can be the actor Kevin Costner, however, who not long ago in a movie made love in a stretch limo, which ought to add nicely to the ample stock of car-connected sex fantasies in American life. (Which reminds me that mine is also the drive-in movie generation, and I shouldn't be at all surprised to learn that many of my contemporaries, when first married, may have required a steering wheel and gearshift installed in their marital beds to make easier the transition to normal conjugal sex.) I recently did a bit of work in a nearby city for a firm that "sent a car" for me; a few days later I was driven home in another. Both were stretch limos, very handsomely appointed, and immensely comfortable too. Unlike Kevin Costner, I used the time spent in them reading the letters of the dour Henry Adams—a case, no doubt, of letting the punishment fit the crime.

It won't do to call Henry Adams himself a car enthusiast, since there was nothing he was enthusiastic about except spreading gloom, yet he was an early user of cars. In 1901, he reports "automobilising" from Paris to Chantilly at the speed of "about three kilometres, or three-fifths of a mile in a minute . . . all the way hanging on to my hair and ears." The following year he writes to his brother Brooks: "If I were just a trifle richer, I should set up an automobile stable, which is now the only amusement worth cultivating." In 1904, he bought an 18-h.p. Mercedes, driven, of course, by a chauffeur. He used cars to travel about France for his researches for his book about the great Gothic churches. In 1908, Adams wrote to his friend Elizabeth Cameron that "my only solid comfort is to have got rid of my automobile," though, as Henry James reported, Adams had "a surviving capacity to be very well taken care of." Not altogether what we should today call "a fun person," Henry Adams.

One cannot say the same for Edith Wharton, who unequivocally adored cars. In one of her ample Panhards, she would swoop down upon Henry James in Rye, stow him alongside her in the backseat, while her husband Teddy sat next to the chauffeur in the front, and roar through the Sussex countryside. My "angel of devastation," James used to call her. Mrs. Wharton, it will be recalled, wrote *A Motor Flight Through France*—and how splendid the word *Flight* is in that title! The book opens as if a firm foot had pressed down on a beautifully crisp accelerator:

> The motor-car has restored the romance of travel. Freeing us from all the compulsions and contacts of the railway, the bondage to fixed hours and the beaten track, the approach to each town through the area of ugliness and desolation created by the railway itself, it has given us back the wonder, the adventure and novelty which enlivened the way of our posting grandparents. Above all these recovered pleasures must be ranked the delight of taking a town unawares, stealing on it by back ways and unchronicled paths, and surprising in it some intimate aspect of past time, some silhouette hidden for half a century or more by the ugly mask of railway embankments and the iron bulk of a huge station. Then the villages that we missed and yearned for from the windows of the train—the unseen villages have been given back to us!—and nowhere could the importance of the recovery have been more delightfully exemplified than on a May afternoon in the Pas-de-Calais, as we climbed the long ascent beyond Boulogne on the road to Arras.

How fortunate that Mrs. Wharton, with her fine spirit of adventure, never lived to drive the San Diego Freeway during evening rush hour!

The car I most want to own is no longer available to me. It was a lush cream-colored Packard convertible owned by a Dr. Henning Melville Swenson, the father of a high school friend. But then I remember, too, a black Cadillac convertible with red leather interior owned by a man named Pete Libby, a widower who when married used to live in our neighborhood and who was later said to have often gone out with the singer Patti Page. The night I saw him in this car, driving down Rush Street with an extremely blonde person in the front seat, it looked like nothing so much as a gondola and he like the Duke of Corona. Then there was another Cadillac convertible I fancied, this one of a rich peach color, owned by

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Sugar Ray Robinson, the greatest boxer of my lifetime, who had a suit and a hat made in the same color. The photograph of man and car appeared a thousand years ago in *Life* magazine.

My fantasy taste seems to run to these largish American cars. When on holiday, and thus in a state of moral relaxation, I tend to rent approximations of them. In recent years, when out of town, I have found myself renting lengthy luxury cars, Cadillac Sevilles and an aircraft-carrier-size machine called a Lincoln Town Car. I was driving the latter when waiting for a large, heavyset man in a soft golf hat, a man I judged to be at the country-club stage of culture, to leave a parking space in a lot outside a restaurant in Maine. He was himself driving a Cadillac Fleetwood of a length that seemed to go on just beyond forever, and, as he pulled out of the space, he noted my Lincoln and gave me a smile of approval. "Soul brother," I read that smile to say.

Ethnic tastes in cars is an unexamined but not uninteresting question. Someone told me that American Greeks who have a bit of money prefer Lincolns. Jews used to stay away from Fords and other cars in the Ford line because of the founder's anti-Semitism, though there may not be very many Jewish car buyers around nowadays with historical memory of that fact. Uneducated blacks once went in for big used Cadillacs, which they called pigs, because of the vast amount of fuel they used. There is an old joke about a black man who, out for a test drive in a new Cadillac, asks the salesman if the car doesn't make him look too Jewish. Generalizations are regularly drawn from cars to owners. Owners of Chrysler products—including Dodges and Plymouths—according to a survey of pizza deliverymen in Detroit, are said to be poor tippers. Physicians used to be instructed by the American Medical Association that it was unseemly to drive a car flashier than a Buick, lest they appear to be hauling in too many shekels, though that day is long past. I am myself always drawing conclusions about people from the cars they drive, estimating from this single datum their financial worth, their aspirations, their general philosophy. I make no claims for the quality of these conclusions, so highly subjective are they—I take solace, you should know, when I discover people driving Rolls-Royces who are homely —but I go on making them nevertheless.

I recently read *The Bookmaker's Daughter* by Shirley Abbott, where I discovered someone else making similar judgments. Miss Abbott is of my generation, and she knows whereof she speaks; she knows her wheels. In the town in which she grew up, Hot Springs, Arkansas, in the forties, she tells us that "the smart money . . . drove inconspicuous old Packards" and "women's automobiles showed what kind of men they had." When her father hadn't the money to take her mother out in the Depression year of 1933, he was at least able to take her for a spin in his red Pontiac coupe, and, while in that car, life was paradise enow. She remembers, and reminds me, that the door of a Buick of a certain era, when closed, "went *hershunk*, decisively, like the door of an Electrolux refrigerator." That is exactly how they sounded. How I wish that I could arrange with my publisher to make my own books, when closed, go *hershunk*.

I haven't actually owned any cars whose doors go *hershunk* either. For someone who has had a lifelong interest in them, I have taken delivery, to use that odd car dealer's locution, on chiefly rather boring cars. One of these was not so much boring as goofy. It was the car called the Pacer, whose body design resembled a turtle with impressive posture. The vast amount of window space it provided must have been what attracted me to it. I bought it during the time when house plants were the rage; perhaps I thought I was acquiring a portable greenhouse designed by the late Buckminster Fuller. Earlier, before owning my aforementioned Volvo, I owned a hot car, a 1969 forest green Pontiac GTO—*varoom, varoom*—that made me feel, while I was driving it, like the Green Hornet. After it and the Volvo and the Pacer, I went, automotively speaking, straight and very square. I bought two Chevys in a row, both Malibu Classiques, and then two Oldsmobiles, Cutlass Cieras.

Need I say that there was nothing remotely Malibuish, Classiquish, Cutlassian, or Cieran about any of these cars. But then, perhaps, on the principle that Humphrey Bogart enunciated in *The Maltese Falcon* of "the cheaper the gunsel, the gaudier the patter," the plainer the American car, the fancier the name given to it. Chevrolet currently has a model that it calls a Celebrity Eurosport. I have never noticed anyone remotely like a celeb-

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rity or a European sport driving it. Nor have I ever seen anyone in the least capricious driving the same company's Caprice. But then neither have I ever seen a true swinger drive an old Dodge Swinger, or a white hunter drive a Safari, a fisherman a Barracuda, a poet a Stanza, a musician a Sonata, but such are among the sobriquets of many cars of recent years. Buick, I note, has a new model that it calls Supercharged Ultra. This seems to me a brilliant ploy to sweep the boards, quite as good in its way as the term *pro-life*, a term that doesn't leave the other side much, which, I guess, is the point.

None of the cars I have owned has ever been, to use another odd car dealer's locution (this one to refer to accessories) "fully loaded." I am not sure quite what "fully loaded" means today; perhaps it includes a microwave oven, a rotating spice rack, a Jacuzzi footbath in the back. Nothing in this realm can surprise. Surely no contemporary car can be considered even half-loaded that doesn't have a car phone. I was once at a meeting with the songwriter Marvin Hamlisch, who noted that, high-tech though our society would seem to be, he had a very difficult time in Los Angeles getting a second line for his car phone. I hoped he was kidding, but have to report that he wasn't.

A car that is fully loaded nowadays must include, too, what are known as vanity license plates, or those plates that spell out your name or a brief wiseguyism or a sexual innuendo. Models of concision, these vanity plates. Who would have thought people could demonstrate their witlessness in so few letters? Or sometimes their pretensiousness. I occasionally pass a Cadillac that has a license plate reading L'Opera; more recently I found myself driving behind a recreational vehicle with a plate reading Goethe. If a vanity plate, why not a philosophical or political bumper sticker? "Subvert the Paradigm" is a bumper sticker I not long ago noted that reminded me that I have not yet read Thomas Kuhn's book on revolution in science. "Stop Unnecessary Circumcision" was one sticker among many I saw on an old Volvo driven by a furry, Koren-like fellow. How pleasant, I thought, not to have to contemplate lunch with the car's owner.

In a novel by Maurice Baring I read that "St. James said that everything in the world is vanity except a carriage." I don't know which St. James this might have been, but the guy may have been onto something. I am currently driving a four-door 1990 BMW 325i, which I bought just as the 1991 model was out and which had 8,000 miles on it. I like it exceedingly. I shall desist from writing a testimonial for it here, but I shall say that this car made me realize that, shallow fellow that I am, I sometimes forget that a small number of material things have the power to make me happy. Not for long, of course; no one is meant to be happy for long, but briefly, fleetingly, yet recurrently. This little car seems to have this power. Large minds are free to think otherwise, to think that the entire matter of cars is a bit of American male craziness, and that anyone who looks to a car for pleasure is a damn fool. "I refute them thus," I imagine Dr. Johnson saying in response to such people, slipping in behind the steering wheel of a 1989 Jaguar, his tires squealing as he peels away from the curb and speeds off into the distance.

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The Abyss Revisited

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB

IN A NOW CLASSIC ESSAY, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," Lionel Trilling described his students' response to his own course on modern literature.

> I asked them to look into the Abyss, and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: "Interesting am I not? And *exciting*, if you consider how deep I am and what dread beasts lie at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a knowledge of me contributes materially to your being whole, or well-rounded, men."

The subjects of that course were the Modernist greats: Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Lawrence, Mann, Gide, Conrad. By way of "background," Trilling had them also read some of the important works that prepared the way for the Modernists: Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and *Genealogy of Morals*, Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*, Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Each of these, the literary and non-literary works alike, was profoundly subversive of culture, society, morality, conventional sexuality—of all that which was once confidently called "civilization." These were the "dread beasts" lurking at the bottom of the "Abyss." And it was this abyss that the students "dutifully and gladly"—and intelligently—looked into and found "interesting," even "exciting."

Trilling's point was that such a course, the teaching of such books, was self-defeating, for it transformed what should have been a profound spiritual and emotional experience into an academic exercise. Instead of hearing the "wild cry" of terror, passion, mystery, rage, rapture, despair in the books they were reading, the students heard themselves (and perhaps their professor) discourse, seriously and sophisticatedly, about *Angst*, alienation, authenticity, sensibility. The effect, Trilling wryly observed, was the opposite of the authors' intention: "the socialization of

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the anti-social, or the acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive."

The image of the abyss haunted the most subversive author on Trilling's reading list, Nietzsche, and of Nietzsche's most subversive hero, Zarathustra.

Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss.

Courage slayeth also giddiness at abysses: and where doth man not stand at abysses! Is not seeing itself—seeing abysses?

Ye are frightened: do your hearts turn giddy? Doth the abyss here yawn for you? Doth the hell-hound here yelp at you?

He who seeth the abyss, but with eagle's eyes—he who with eagle's talons *graspeth* the abyss: he hath courage.

The same image is at the heart of *The Birth of Tragedy,* where it represents the primal, tragic, "unnatural crime" epitomized by the myth of Oedipus and revealed by the "wisdom" of Dionysus. Because that crime is so monstrous, the wisdom that recognizes and embraces it seems equally criminal, for "whoever, in pride of knowledge, hurls nature into the abyss of destruction, must himself experience nature's disintegration." Those who cannot confront that abyss with the Dionysiac wisdom, the "divine frenzy," of the artist or poet, may take refuge in the more serene view of Apollonian philosophy, or in Sophocles' tamer version of the Oedipal myth, which superimposes upon it "the luminous afterimage which kind nature provides our eyes after a look into the abyss." For Nietzsche, however, the awesome reality of the abyss can only be experienced as pure Dionysiac tragedy.

Indeed, my friends, believe with me in this Dionysiac life and in the rebirth of tragedy! Socratic man has run his course; crown your heads with ivy, seize the thyrsus, and do not be surprised if tiger and panther lie down and caress your feet! Dare to lead the life of tragic man, and you will be redeemed.

This is what Trilling's students were reading and what they glibly translated into the fashionable vocabulary of the time, thereby domesticating the wild beasts and inuring themselves to the terror of the abyss. On another occasion Trilling described the typical reader of this subversive literature: "Having come to take nullity for granted, he wants to be enlightened and entertained by statements about the nature of nothing,

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what its size is, how it is furnished, what services the management provides, what sort of conversation and amusements can go on in it." This is precisely what Nietzsche anticipated when he mocked those who engaged in "so much loose talk about art and [had] so little respect for it," who used "Beethoven and Shakespeare as subjects for light conversation."

Nietzsche wrote more than a century ago; Trilling a few decades ago. Since then the abyss has grown deeper and more perilous, with new and more dreadful terrors lurking at the bottom. The beasts of modernism have mutated into the beasts of post-modernism—relativism into nihilism, amorality into immorality, irrationality into insanity, sexual deviancy into polymorphous perversity. And since then generations of students under the guidance of their professors have looked into the abyss, have contemplated those beasts, and have said, "How interesting, how exciting."

When I reread Trilling's essay recently, I was struck by how pertinent it is to the present state of the academic culture, indeed, more pertinent than it was in his own day. Trilling was troubled by the ease with which great books could be emasculated (a word one hardly dares use today), passionate affirmations reduced to rote formulas, subversive ideas made banal and respectable. But his students were at least reading those books and confronting those ideas. One cannot say that with any confidence today.

Today, students in some of the most eminent departments of literature are more often reading books about how to read books. Literary theory has replaced literature itself as the fashionable subject of study. Structuralism and deconstruction, gender theory and the new historicism, reader-response and speech-act theory—these are more hotly debated than the content and style of particular novels and poems. And when novels or poems are the ostensible subject of discussion, the theorists are so dominant ("hegemonic" or "privileged," as they would say), so insistent upon their superiority over author and work alike, that their comments on the latter are little more than commentaries on their own modes of criticism.

A book by one prominent theorist, Jonathan Culler, opens with a chapter aptly entitled "Beyond Interpretation," suggesting that the interpretation of individual works is beneath the consideration of the serious theorist, indeed an impediment to theory. "Formerly," he observes with satisfaction, "the history of criticism was part of the history of literature. . . . Now the history of literature is part of the history of criticism." Another professor, Gerald Graff, reasons that since the various literary theories are irreconcilable, the only solution is to make them

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the focus of instruction, and this in undergraduate as well as graduate classes. Lionel Trilling would have been confirmed in his worst fears by this suggestion, which elevates theory above interpretation as well as literature, thus making the problem itself the solution. He would also have savored the irony of the title of Graff's influential book, *Professing Literature*—not reading or appreciating or understanding or experiencing literature, but "professing" it. (Trilling's own anthology of great literature is fittingly entitled *The Experience of Literature*.)

Moreover, the literature that is "professed," when theorists condescend to discuss actual works of literature, are "texts"—the very word denigrating both the idea of literature and the idea of greatness. As a text, Superman is as worthy of study as Shakespeare, or an obscure woman writer (obscure for good reason) as meretorious as George Eliot (who is suspect not only because she assumed that male pseudonym but because she made a profession of being a writer rather than a feminist-writer). A former graduate student at Louisiana State University, mindful of the grand tradition of Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and the *Southern Review*, was dismayed to discover that their successors, although insistent on opening the "canon" to women and black writers, have little concern with the literary merit of their work and no passion or even enthusiasm for it; they are merely making political statements. They are, in fact, more interested in theory than in literature—any kind of literature. Given the assignment to "deconstruct something," one enterprising student chose to deconstruct the game "Trivial Pursuit," which, he triumphantly reported, the professor "loved."

If literature is what theorists choose to call it, it is not surprising that interpretation (when they deign to interpret) is what they make of it. One of the gurus of this school, Stanley Fish, once said that the demise of objectivity "relieves me of the obligation to be right . . . and demands only that I be interesting." He now regrets that statement, but he has not disavowed the sentiment. To be sure, what theorists regard as "interesting" may not be what a literate reader, unfamiliar with their arcane language and devious reasoning, would find intelligible, let alone interesting. For theorists what is interesting is what is unconventional, *outré*, paradoxical, contradictory, opaque. Since there is no "right" interpretation, the opportunities to be "interesting," in this sense, are unlimited. And since novels and poems are simply "texts" ("pretexts," one might say) which are entirely indeterminate, they can be "textualized," "contextualized," "recontextualized," "intertextualized" at will. The result is a kind of free-floating verbal association, in which any word or idea can suggest any other (including, or especially, its opposite), and any text can be related in any fashion to any other.

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Indeed, the very words of the text are recast, rearranged, and redefined. Puns and double entendres are discovered and new meanings are elicited (often the opposite of the original meanings) by such devices as hyphenating words, introducing parentheses within words, adding syllables to the beginning, middle, or end of words, and crossing out words while keeping them in the text—thus signifying the contradiction, paradox, irony, and indeterminacy of "non-linear thinking." In this world of Aesopian language, Jacques Derrida, and Geoffrey Hartman after him, find it easy to reduce the philosopher Hegel to the word "Hegel" (in quotation marks), which, in turn, evokes the French "*aigle*," the English "eagle," and the German "*Ekel*" (the latter meaning not eagle but disgust; the German word for eagle, *Adler*, not lending itself to this play on words). Not all of the practitioners of these arts identify themselves as deconstructionists, but they are engaged in the tasks of deconstruction, reconstruction, and ad hoc construction. (Perhaps because of the criticism leveled against deconstruction, especially since the revelations of Paul de Man's collaboration with the Nazis, many theorists who once proudly declared themselves disciples of Derrida and de Man deny that they are now, or ever have been, deconstructionists; some profess not to know any deconstructionists.)

Perhaps the most famous example of deconstructionist interpretation is J. Hillis Miller's analysis of one of Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal." This is especially noteworthy because the poem has been admired by generations of readers and commented on by a host of scholars, because Miller is so enamored of his own reading of it that he has repeated it on several occasions, and because it has been taken as a model of the deconstructionist technique by deconstructionists themselves (as well as by their critics, most recently by David Lehman in *Signs of the Times*). The poem also has the virtue of being so brief—only eight short lines—that one can easily keep it in mind as one reads the interpretation.

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears;
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Traditionally the poem has been read as an elegy, a memorial to a girl who died at a tragically young age. Most commentators have dwelt upon what would be obvious to a thoughtful reader—the contrast, for example,

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between the two stanzas, between past and present, life and death, the innocence of youth and the tragic sense of mortality that comes with age. Miller finds in it a good many other contrasts, starting with "male as against female" and going on to more imaginative ones: "mother as against daughter or sister, or perhaps any female family member as against daughter or sister, or perhaps any female family member as against some woman from outside the family, that is, mother, sister, or daughter against mistress or wife, in short, incestuous desires against legitimate sexual feelings." He also brings to bear upon the poem—in accord with the principle that any text is relevant to any other, however far removed by time or subject—such authorities as Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, Nietzsche, Wallace Stevens, Plato, Thales, and especially Heidegger. Heidegger's play on the word "thing," for example, in his commentary on Plato's *Thaetetus*, is said to elucidate Wordsworth's use of that word. "A young girl," Miller deduces from Heidegger, "is a thing because something is missing in her which men have."

But the poem is even "odder" than this, Miller says, as he proceeds to explicate the "obscure sexual drama" played out in it, a drama that has its source in the death of Wordsworth's own mother when he was eight. Lucy represents at the same time "the virgin child and the missing mother," a "virgin 'thing' " who is "sexually penetrated while still remaining virgin." And the speaker in the poem is not only the opposite of Lucy—"male to her female, adult knowledge to her prepubertal innocence"; he is also "the displaced representative of both the penetrated and the penetrator." In fact Lucy and the speaker are "the same," though the poet is also "the perpetually excluded difference from Lucy, an unneeded increment, like an abandoned child." Since "Lucy" means ("of course") light, to "possess" Lucy would be to rejoin the "lost source of light"; thus Lucy is also the male principle, the "father sun as logos." To think about Lucy's death is to cause her death, for "thinking recapitulates in reverse mirror image the action of the earthly years in touching, penetrating, possessing, killing, encompassing, turning the other into oneself and therefore being left only with a corpse, an empty sign."

And so the interpretation goes on, becoming more and more involuted and convoluted. Miller finally concludes that he has "seemingly" come far from the subject of his essay, "the state of contemporary literary study." But one might also conclude that he has come even further from those eight delicate lines of the poem.

This exercise in deconstruction recalls an image used by Trilling in another prophetic essay. While literary critics, he said, were endowing literature with "virtually angelic powers," they were also making it clear

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to the readers of literature that "the one thing you do not do when you meet an angel is wrestle with him." What would he have said of critics today who tell their readers that when you meet an angel not only do you not wrestle with him, you play with him—play word games with him, play fast and loose with his "text," play havoc with reason, common sense, and emotion? It is ironic, in view of the turgidity of their prose, to find deconstructionists solemnly invoking the principle of *"jouissance"* or *"tromperie,"* and to hear Geoffrey Hartman call them, not in criticism but in praise, "clowns or jongleurs."

It is in this spirit, playfully and at the same time ponderously, that deconstructionists summon up the image of the abyss. Do we not all experience, Hartman observes, "the fear (a thrilling fear) of the abyss in all words whose resonance haunts us and must be appeased"? A translator of Derrida prefaces one of his works: "The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom." And Paul de Man is described as "the only man who ever looked into the abyss and came away smiling." De Man came away smiling, perhaps, for the same reason that Hartman found it thrilling and Derrida pleasurable—because his abyss is a purely linguistic one, constructed entirely out of words, indeed out of a play on words, and thus as readily deconstructed. (De Man did, in fact, look into a real abyss, the abyss of Nazism, and came away smiling—as did those deconstructionists who rallied to his defense. If, as some have argued, deconstructionism is not implicated in de Man's behavior, it is implicated in that of his defenders, who used the tools of their trade, of deconstructionism, to interpret his "texts" so as to belittle or even deny their patent anti-Semitism.)

Philosophy also has its abysses, and some philosophers are confronting them in the same way—playfully and irreverently. Richard Rorty, currently one of America's most respected philosophers, calls himself a pragmatist, but in so "light-minded" a fashion that one can hardly recognize any kinship with his notably grave progenitor, John Dewey.

The main principle governing Rorty's philosophy is that there is no fixed or fundamental principle, no "essential" truth or reality. Indeed, philosophy, he says, no longer exists as an independent discipline. Marx once promised to abolish philosophy by replacing it with "positive science" (that is, Marxism), which he deemed to be scientific rather than philosophical because it was simply the depiction of "reality." Rorty promises to abolish philosophy by abolishing reality itself, which he regards as the arbitrary construct of the philosopher. Unlike Marx, he believes that his revolution is already largely accomplished. It is getting more and more difficult, he good-humoredly observes, to locate "a real

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live metaphysical prig," who thinks there is a reality to be examined and a truth about reality to be discovered. There are a few such dodoes left, to be sure. "You can still find philosophy professors who will solemnly tell you that they are seeking *the truth*, not just a story or a consensus but an honest-to-God, down-home, accurate representation of the way the world is. A few of them will even claim to write in a clear, precise, transparent way, priding themselves on manly straightforwardness, on abjuring 'literary' devices." Rorty himself, happily, has given up any such obsolete "philosophical machismo." He has even gone so far in repudiating "machismo" as to use the feminine pronoun in referring to the "anti-essentialist" philosopher and the masculine pronoun to the "essentialist"—this after identifying himself as an "anti-essentialist."

Rather than seek an essential truth, philosophers should choose to "dream up as many new contexts as possible . . . to be as polymorphous in our adjustments as possible, to recontextualize for the hell of it." They should, in fact, become philosophers-cum-poets, adopting a "light-minded aestheticism" to traditional philosophical questions, for only such an aestheticism can further the "disenchantment of the world." This disenchantment, moreover, must extend itself to morality as well as truth. Just because other people take moral issues seriously does not mean that one should share that seriousness. On the contrary, one should "josh them" out of the habit of being serious and get them to look at moral issues aesthetically, playfully.

The problem with "taking philosophy seriously," Rorty explains, is that to do so is not only philosophically naive, positing a reality and a truth that do not exist, but politically dangerous, since essentialism encourages fundamentalism and fanaticism of the kind displayed by Shiites, Marxists, and Nazis. This is Heidegger's great fault. It is not his particular doctrines about the nature of man, reason, or history that are "intrinsically fascistic." Nor are his doctrines invalidated by the fact that he himself was a Nazi, an anti-Semite, and altogether "a rather nasty piece of work." His mistake was rather in thinking that "philosophy must be taken seriously." Rorty warns us against the same mistake. An original philosopher is the product of a "neural kink," and one should no more look to him for wisdom or morality than to an original mathematician, or microbiologist, or chess master. Heidegger is original in this sense, and one should take from him and make of him what one likes—which is not at all, Rorty admits, what Heidegger might have liked. The proper approach to Heidegger is "to read his books as he would not have wished them to be read: in a cool hour, with curiosity, and an open, tolerant mind."

Heidegger looked into the abyss of philosophy and saw the beasts of Nazism—became, in fact, a Nazi. Rorty looks into the abyss of

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Heidegger—coolly, curiously, tolerantly—and sees not Heidegger as he saw himself, indeed as he was, but an "original and interesting writer." Divorced from the essential truth, the practical morality, and the political consequences of his own philosophy, Heidegger can be readily assimilated into Rorty's philosophy. By the same token, we can look into Rorty and see him not as he sees himself, as the only reliable philosopher of liberal democracy, but as the proponent of a relativism so extreme as to verge on nihilism—a nihilism that may subvert liberal democracy together with all the other priggish metaphysical notions about truth, morality, and reality.

And so with the discipline of history, which has more than its share of abysses and still more historians prepared to make of them what they will. Like those literary critics who recontextualize and deconstruct texts, or those philosophers who abolish philosophy and aestheticize morality, so there are historians who undertake to "demystify" and "demythologize" history. This is the avowed purpose behind two of the most popular schools of history: that which purports to explain everything in terms of race, class, and gender; and that which focuses entirely upon the daily lives of ordinary people—"history from below," as it is called. Both of these schools have the effect of belying or belittling the abysses as well as the peaks of history—those momentous events, individuals, and ideas which have traditionally given history its drama and its meaning.

But there are other more sophisticated ways of demystifying history. One such technique, borrowed from sociology and anthropology, is structuralism. This displaces attention from the actors and events of history to the impersonal structures and forces that are presumed to determine history. To structuralize the history of Nazism, for example, is to interpret it not in terms of the ideas, policies, and actions of Hitler and the Nazis, but in terms of the structure of the German polity and bureaucracy, the nature of the military and social establishments, the exigencies of economics, geography, and demography. The effect is to mitigate the horror of the Holocaust and the sheer evil of Nazism. So too with Communism, which is seen not as a tyranny imposed by Stalin in accord with the Communist ideology, but as a series of improvised policies reflecting the pressure of "social constituencies" from below rather than the deliberate policies of the totalitarian regime above. The very term "totalitarianism" is rejected as moralistic and ideological. Looking into these abysses—the most fearsome in modern history—the structuralists see not beasts but faceless bureaucrats, not corpses but statistics, not gas chambers and gulags but military-industrial-geopolitical complexes.

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Another way of demystifying history—this borrowed from literary theorists—is by deconstructing it. Events are "texts" to be interpreted by historians, much as poems are interpreted by critics. And just as critics assert their authority over poets, so historians assert their authority in the interpretation of events over the contemporaries who actually experienced those events. Indeed the past itself is deprived of any authority, any objective reality or factuality. There is no "correspondence," we are told, between interpretation and fact because there is no fact, no reality, independent of interpretation. The old-fashioned notion that there is a reality or factuality in the past, however difficult it may be to discover it, is derided as "facticity." And the word "fact" is placed within quotation marks to suggest how factitious it is.

This mode of thought, while pursued most systematically by deconstructionists, is by no means exclusive to them. Shorn of some of its more esoteric vocabulary, it is espoused by others who think of themselves as relativists and who profess to be doing nothing more than following the old dictum that there is no absolute truth in history. In the new version, however, the denial of absolute truth becomes a denial of any kind or degree of truth. If there is no absolute truth, the reasoning now goes, there is no truth at all. And if historians cannot attain absolute objectivity, they are presumed incapable of attaining any degree of objectivity. Hence they are absolved of the need to aspire to objectivity, however relative or limited, and they are freed from all those constraints (documentation and footnotes, substantiating and countervailing evidence) that once were the stock-in-trade of the historian. The new relativists—absolute relativists, so to speak—recognize only the obligations of candor and creativity: candor in revealing their own interests (derived from their race, class, and gender), and creativity in constructing a plausible past that is congruent with their interests.

"Creative," "imaginative," "inventive"—these are the honorific terms in this newest version of the new history. In an article entitled "'Facts' and History" (with facts in quotation marks), a historian describes the process of "imaginative creation" essential to the "historical imagination," warning his young colleagues not to become "fact fetishists" like their benighted elders. And a study of biographical writing tells us that the methodology "celebrated" by contemporary biographers is "'freedom' from fact"—what Virginia Woolf called "creative fact."

The distinguished historian Simon Schama has been so creative in his recent book, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)*, as to introduce entirely fictional characters and scenes. Only in an "Afterword" does he explain that the two essays in this volume are really "historical novellas." Since this book, like his earlier one on the French

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Revolution, dispenses with footnotes, his readers have no way of knowing, until this point, that what seems to be historical is at least partly fictional. (When one of the essays appeared earlier in the English journal *Granta,* it was without the afterword and without any hint that it was anything but conventional history.)

Few historians have been as boldly creative as Schama. More often, creation, invention, and imagination have taken the form of interpretation rather than outright fiction—although sometimes the distinction seems arbitrary. In the same symposium (and the same issue of the *Radical History Review)* exposing the fallacy of "fact fetishism," another contributor, the distinguished historian Natalie Zemon Davis, gives a practical demonstration of the creative use of the historical imagination. (It is interesting that three of the writers discussed here—Davis, Rorty, and Miller—have been presidents of their professional associations.)

The symposium is a defense of the historian David Abraham, whose book on the Weimar Republic has been much criticized for its faulty scholarship. One of the charges concerns his dedication, and it is to this that Davis addresses herself. The dedication reads: "For my parents—who at Auschwitz and elsewhere suffered the worst consequences of what I can merely write about." A naive reader might suppose that the "worst consequences" suffered by the author's parents, as by so many others at Auschwitz and elsewhere, was death. In fact, his parents were alive when his book was published. In a thousand words Davis deconstructs and reconstructs that nineteen-word dedication so that it becomes a tribute not to dead parents but to live ones—and a tribute as well to the "survivors' son," the dedicator, who has penetrated to a deeper truth about Nazism than the superficial one that might be inferred from the dedication.

Davis explains why that superficial reading is erroneous. Few readers, she explains, are likely to interpret it as a dedication to the dead, since one cannot dedicate anything to the dead but only "to their memory." Moreover, the book jacket identifies the author as an "Assistant Professor at Princeton," which implies that he was too young to be the son of parents who perished in the camps. She then goes on to explicate the nature of dedications in general and of this in particular. "A dedication is a public gift of a work to someone, often in first books to parents, who are thanked for the gift of life, of care, or of learning." In this case, the dedication is not only an expression of thanks to the author's parents but also a reminder of "their special relation to his subject matter." While the book itself, Davis admits, says almost nothing about anti-Semitism (because it is a "structural analysis" of the roots of Nazism and therefore deals with impersonal "social forces"), the last line of the book "circles round to the 'consequences' of the dedication" by

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referring to the German businessmen who paved "the road to serfdom" with "gold and blood." The dedication is thus a "strategy" by which the survivor's son reclaims the past. "So that's how it happened, says the survivor's son [or so Davis has him saying]; not the work of devils, but of historical forces and actors." This, she concludes, is the message of the dedication: "turn suffering into writing and figuring out, inform accusations with understanding, let the tragic endings of 'gold and blood' not be the last word."

One's admiration for the creativity of this exercise is tempered by the realization of how remote it is from the "text" itself, from the "worst consequences" suffered by the author's parents at Auschwitz and elsewhere. One may also be dismayed by the expenditure of so much creativity on a subject as solemn and unambiguous as the life and death of one's parents—and, for that matter, on the subject of the Holocaust itself—an all too real abyss in which millions of people did in fact suffer the worst consequences.

The implications of this mode of thought have not been fully appreciated. What happens to our sense of the past when we are told that there is no past save that which the historian creates; or to the integrity of history when the historian is encouraged to be suspicious of "facts" and contemptuous of "fact-fetishism"; or to the momentousness of history when we are assured that it is we who give moment to history; or to that most momentous and murderous of all historical events, the Holocaust, when it is divorced from human volition and thus from the attribute of evil? What happens to our respect for philosophy—the "love of wisdom," as it once was—when we are told that philosophy has nothing to do with either wisdom or morality, that there are no metaphysical truths but only conventions of language and metaphor, that morality is only a form of aesthetics, and that the best thing we can do is not to take philosophy seriously? And what happens to our passion for literature when any "text" qualifies as literature, when theory is elevated above poetry and the critic above the poet, and when everything, literature and interpretation alike, is said to be indeterminate and infinitely malleable?

And what happens when we look into the abyss and see no real beasts but only a pale reflection of ourselves—of our particular race, class, and gender; or, worse yet, when we see only the metaphorical, rhetorical, linguistic, semiotic, figurative simulations of our imaginations? And when, looking at figments so divorced from reality, we are moved to say, like Trilling's students, "How interesting, how exciting"?

When Nietzsche looked into the abyss, he saw not only real beasts, but the beast in himself. "He who fights with monsters," he warned his

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reader, "should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." This was all too prophetic, for a few years later the abyss did gaze back at him and drew him down into the depths of insanity.

Nietzsche is now a darling of the academy. I have seen T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan, "Nietzsche is Peachy." Nietzsche, who had no high regard for the academy but did have a highly developed sense of irony, would have enjoyed that sight.

This Poem

is for the quiet, uncelebrated
things of the world—
the road to no familiar place,
love's skill on a troubled night,
the unpublished poem and lost song,
the way of the wild drake,
and night's festival of sound;
for body's silent defeat of disease,
and mysteries that hold their secrets.
For multitudes of creatures and created
things clothed in the graceful sanctity
of their rightful natures.

JOSEPH HARRIS

✪ JOSEPH HARRIS's poems and short stories have appeared in many anthologies and magazines, including *Poetry Magazine*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *Spectator*.

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Sunday Service

DOUG BOULTER

An abandoned roadbed of the C&O Railroad
On a Sunday morning
As the rain continued to fall.
Hardly my choice,
But you were distinctly edgy
And had written "walk" on your list of things to do.
I would have continued to worship between the sheets,
Looking for the paper and coffee at noon,
But I recognize fervor when I see it,
So we walked.

We had the trail pretty much to ourselves,
Our fellow communicants consisting of
Two joggers,
Looking for all the world like self-flagellants
In ecstasy at their proof of devotion.
Even the beasts of the forest had enough sense
To stay out of the rain,
Not themselves needing the exercise.

By the first half-mile marker
As the gray, light rain began to penetrate
Our jackets,
Head bowed, determined,
I strode forward with all the ardor of
A recent convert,
Baptized by immersion.

You caught your second wind, and me,
As the rain began to come down in sheets.
We turned back at the 2½ milepost
As my thoughts of salvation focused on

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A hot shower and dry clothes.
Some may find evidence of divine inspiration
In nature,
But I confess that, at that moment,
I wasn't looking very hard.

We fell silent with about a mile to go,
Heads down and teeth clenched,
Certain of our rectitude
In this literal vale of tears.
We jogged the last half mile as if
Offering a last proof of our faith.

And yet, when we were inside, warm and dry,
I did feel somehow absolved,
Ready to sit down to lunch and
Sin again.

✪ DOUG BOULTER lives in Alexandria, Virginia. "Sunday Service" is his first published poem.

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The Last Time I Saw Paris

TOM DISCH

Will I never see Paris again? It may well be.
Or Salina Cruz? Almost certainly.
But London: surely I'll live that long.
And Ischia, Naples, Capri—I must see them again,
    Although I don't know when.
    Not tomorrow, but soon.

And which are the dishes I have unwittingly
Tasted a final time? Stewed tripe? I can live
With that. Various fruits peculiar to Brazil.
But not, I beg of fate, Aunt Cece's lemon pudding.
    For I mean to make some more.
    Not tomorrow, but soon.

And which are the friends I'll see no more,
Whether by their demise or mine,
Or merely through the slow attrition
Of concern: what are their names?
    If I knew, I'd phone.
    Not tomorrow, but soon.

✪ TOM DISCH's most recent book of poetry is *Dark Verses and Light*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

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The Trouble with Adam Smith

THOMAS K. McCRAW

THE BATTLE between Adam Smith and Karl Marx is over. By a late-round technical knockout, Smith and capitalism have won. But now a second championship fight is under way, a contest between different kinds of capitalism. In one corner stands a relatively laissez-faire consumer variety represented by the United States. In the other corner is a more nationalistic, producer-oriented capitalism epitomized by Germany, Japan, and the "Little Dragons" of East Asia (Korea and Taiwan).

The theoretical split that underlies this competition is best exemplified by Adam Smith on the one hand, and on the other by the two great prophets of activist national developmental policy. These are the American Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804) and the German Friedrich List (1789–1846). So far, in the realms of ideology and academic theory, Smith is ahead on points. But there is reason to believe he will fade in the middle and late rounds, and in this essay I want to explain why. I will do this not through an extended comparison of Smith with Hamilton and List, but by looking mostly at Smith alone—at his intellectual strengths and weaknesses, his preferred units of analysis, and especially his hostile attitude toward organizations.

I

Ever since its publication in 1776, *The Wealth of Nations* has been regarded as the most influential book on economics ever written. Ronald Coase, the 1991 Nobel laureate in economics, called it "a work that one contemplates with awe. In keenness of analysis and in its range it surpasses any other book on economics. Its preeminence is, however, disturbing. What have we been doing in the last 200? years?" Joseph Schumpeter, though no particular admirer of Adam Smith, described it

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as "the most successful not only of all books on economics but, with the possible exception of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, of all scientific books that have appeared to this day."

The influence of *The Wealth of Nations* has always been high, but of course higher at some moments than others. When it was first published, it received a fair amount of attention but did not have a sensational success. In the first two or three decades after publication, its powerful messages about free trade and minimal government seeped slowly into the consciousness and everyday vocabularies of British and American citizens. Soon its translation into French, German, Spanish, and other languages spread Smith's influence to Europe and Latin America. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its message penetrated Japanese, Chinese, and other Asian circles.

Every fifty years since 1776, as the economist R. D. Collison Black has noted, *The Wealth of Nations* has been memorialized in formal ceremony. In 1826, the author had been dead for only thirty-six years and had not yet attained the status of sainthood. Accordingly, David Ricardo and others of that generation threw reverence to the winds and criticized some of Smith's technical errors. On the other hand, both they and numerous politicians had long since embraced Smith's system of "natural liberty" and its free-trade implications. By 1846, the Corn Laws had been repealed and the era of free trade and international British economic hegemony had begun.

Thirty years later, in the centennial celebrations of 1876, the policy side of Adam Smith, as distinct from the analytical, received even greater emphasis in both Britain and America. Having witnessed Britain's rise to unmatched prosperity under its free-trade regime, celebrants were ready to proclaim Smith *the* prophet of political economy. Economic theory, however, was now in turmoil. The classical system was being challenged by Marx and the socialists and also by Léon Walras and the marginalists. By the late nineteenth century it had come under relentless attack by popular critics of industrialism—writers such as Carlyle and Dickens in Britain, Victor Hugo in France, Henry George and Henry Demarest Lloyd in America. Adam Smith's laissez-faire system seemed linked to an ominous polarization of wealth and to the horrifying industrial squalor that plagued European cities.

By the 150th anniversary of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1926, enlightened capitalism and the emerging welfare state had eliminated some of the squalor, though little of the maldistribution of wealth. On the theory side, the neoclassical reconstruction was nearly complete, and the economics of Alfred Marshall ruled the academy alongside marginalism, to which it was tied. Yet doubts about Adam Smith had again become rife. For a world trying to recover from the Great War, the merits of free

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trade and laissez-faire were far from self-evident. Perhaps in consequence, 1926 was the least joyous, though most intellectually interesting, of all the anniversaries.

Fifty years later, in 1976, conditions had become uniquely propitious for celebration of Smithian policy as well as theory. With the triumph of capitalism over its rivals finally in sight, with deregulation and privatization on the lips of economists and politicians all over the world, and with American bicentennial hoopla at full throttle, Adam Smith had reached the highest pedestal. The Chicago economist Milton Friedman had just won the Nobel Prize. His colleague George J. Stigler, an equally ardent Smithian, was about to win one of his own. *The Wealth of Nations* had become more fashionable than at any other time in its history. Inexpensive paperback editions proliferated. A huge project to edit and republish all of Smith's works was under way, sponsored by the University of Glasgow and Oxford University Press. By 1981, the young Washington commandos of the Reagan Revolution were sporting neckties decorated with Smith's profile. (Their identification of *The Wealth of Nations* with Reaganite principles had a certain logic, but they should also have known that Smith despised conspicuous consumption and favoritism toward the wealthy.) By 1989, with the collapse of socialist regimes in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, Smith reigned as intellectual king of the economic hill.

II

In person, Adam Smith seemed the unlikeliest of guides to the practical world. He was, hands down, the most absentminded economist in the history of the discipline. Once he put bread and butter into boiling water and complained that he had never tasted a worse cup of tea. Bumbling and ungainly, he was forever talking to himself, sometimes in a loud voice. "His absence of mind was amazing," wrote Walter Bagehot. "On one occasion, having to sign his own name to an official document, he produced not his own signature, but an elaborate imitation of the signature of the person who signed before him; on another, a sentinel on duty having saluted him in military fashion" [doing the "Present Arms" movement with his rifle], Smith "astounded and offended the man by acknowledging it with a copy—a very clumsy copy no doubt—of the same gestures."

Altogether, he represented an easy target for future critics. Schumpeter liked to ridicule Smith's "sheltered and uneventful life" as "a professor born and bred." He noted with relish that Smith's understanding of human nature was circumscribed by the fact "that no woman, excepting his mother, ever played a role in his existence: in this as in

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other respects the glamours and passions of life were just literature to him." This comment reveals less about Smith than about Schumpeter, the self-styled world's leading economist and greatest lover; and it is not quite accurate. Smith did lead the quiet life of a scholar, but his cousin Jane Douglas kept house for him over many years, and during a sojourn to France in the 1760s he made lasting friendships with several women who presided over Paris salons.

Smith (1723–1790) was born and raised in Kirkcaldy, a town of about fifteen hundred on the North Sea side of Scotland, just across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh. His father, several other relatives, and eventually he himself were employed by the Scottish civil service, an ironic circumstance given his future reputation as an anti-government man. As a child, he was delicate and dreamy, subject, as his biographer John Rae puts it, to "those fits of absence and that habit of speaking to himself which he carried all through life." Kidnapped by gypsies at the age of three, he was returned to his mother in short order. "He would have made, I fear, a poor gipsy," Rae avers. As an adult, Smith once went out for a nocturnal stroll wearing his dressing gown and, deep in thought, walked all the way to Dunfermline, fifteen miles west of Kirkcaldy.

After a local elementary education, Smith entered the University of Glasgow at the age of fourteen. In his three years there, he earned an M.A. and became excited by the philosophic teachings of Francis Hutcheson, the likely source of Smith's powerful economic ideas about the division of labor. He then spent six years at Oxford on a scholarship, one of a tiny number of Scots among the total of one hundred students enrolled at Balliol College. Little is known of his years at Oxford except that, judging from the evidence of his later writings, he detested it. He found no new Hutchesons to inspire him, and he came to regard the English university system as generally corrupt and inferior to that of Scotland.

Smith returned to his mother's home in Kirkcaldy in 1746. Now twenty-three years old, still studious and unprepossessing, he felt no attraction to either the ministry or the law. For a couple of years he did nothing, at least nothing that was recorded. Then came a sudden opportunity. He was invited by some prominent men of Edinburgh to give a series of public lectures on rhetoric, belles lettres, and jurisprudence. In the presentations that followed, he proved such an able scholar and speaker that in 1751 he was elected to the chair of logic at the University of Glasgow. Later in that same year he moved up to the more prestigious chair of moral philosophy, once held by his own teacher, the "never to be forgotten" Hutcheson.

Smith remained at Glasgow for twelve years, lecturing and writing. In 1759, at the age of thirty-six, he brought out the first of his two great

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books. This was *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which soon made him moderately famous in Britain and throughout Europe. Six English editions were published during his lifetime. Three French and two German translations appeared before the end of the eighteenth century.

The Theory of Moral Sentiments is a long, engaging treatise on human nature and ethical systems. Written in the "plain style" Smith cultivated, it flows so easily that one suspects it originated as a series of oral presentations to undergraduates. "It is rather painting than writing," waxed Edmund Burke in his review. The book combines in approximately equal parts what today would be taught in departments of ethics, psychology, and sociology. The unit of analysis is the individual. The theme is the evolution of moral structures and the mixture of motivations that govern human behavior. There is much criticism of the pursuit of wealth and of undue admiration for "the rich and powerful," which Smith finds "the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments." The analytical emphasis is on "sympathy" (what we would call empathy), "self-love" (self-interest), and the "impartial spectator" (one's conscience, reinforced by a desire to be well regarded by others and to deserve their high regard). The opening sentence of the book suggests both its concentration on human nature and its appealing tone: "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it." The book is much less preoccupied with "the invisible hand" of beneficent market forces than is *The Wealth of Nations*, which appeared seventeen years later.

Among contemporary admirers of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was the English statesman Charles Townshend, stepfather of the young Duke of Buccleuch. Townshend had visited Glasgow not long after reading the book. (The ever-distracted Smith, conducting him on a visit to a local tannery, fell into a vat of evil-smelling liquid and had to excuse himself.) In 1763, when the duke reached the age of seventeen, Townshend proposed that Smith become his tutor during a projected three-year tour of the Continent. This sort of arrangement, which was regarded as an elite alternative to university education, was not uncommon in the eighteenth century. For Smith, then forty years of age, Townshend's offer was too lucrative to refuse. It provided for £300 annually plus traveling expenses, and, afterward, £300 per year for life. This was about twice his salary at the University of Glasgow, which included no provision for his retirement years. Altogether, it represented a very handsome sum; the average yearly wage of laboring persons in 1760s Britain was £25–£30.

Although he had never before visited the Continent, Adam Smith was

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by this time no mere provincial. Despite his clumsiness and notorious absentmindedness, he moved in the highest intellectual circles of England and Scotland. Glasgow was still a two-week stagecoach ride from London, but Smith was already (or soon to be) acquainted with Lord Shelburne, Edward Gibbon, Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, Oliver Goldsmith, and the American Benjamin Franklin. (It is worth noting that, in 1755, Smith's native Scotland contained only about one and a quarter million inhabitants. The population of England and Wales was just over six million, of the North American colonies that became the United States about one and a half million. The grand total was about nine million, as compared to more than three hundred million today.) Smith's closest friend was David Hume, who, some scholars believe, was the source of his obsession for free trade.

As Bagehot remarked, there was about Adam Smith "a sort of lumbering bonhomie which amused and endeared him to those around him." Alexander Carlyle, a prominent Presbyterian minister from Edinburgh, said:

> [Smith's] voice was harsh and enunciation thick, approaching to stammering. . . . He was the most absent man in company that I ever saw, moving his lips, and talking to himself, and smiling, in the midst of large companies. If you awaked him from his reverie and made him attend to the subject of conversation, he immediately began a harangue, and never stopped till he told you all he knew about it, with the utmost philosophical ingenuity . . . but when you checked him or doubted, he retracted with the utmost ease, and contradicted all he had been saying.

According to James Boswell, who had been Smith's pupil at the University of Glasgow, Dr. Johnson considered him "as dull a dog as ever he met with." Smith, returning the favor, "said that he imputed Johnson's roughness to a certain degree of insanity which he thought he had."

By early 1764, Smith and the young Duke of Buccleuch had made their way to Toulouse. For several weeks things remained dull, and Smith, as he reported to Hume, began "to write a book in order to pass away the time." The book turned out to be *The Wealth of Nations*, over which he labored for the next dozen years. Soon the social pace picked up, with periodic whirls of dinner parties and attendance at Paris salons.

More to Smith's reflective tastes, the Buccleuch party began to enjoy unlimited entrée to French intellectual life. He met A. R. J. Turgot, the future finance minister who was then writing his own influential treatise, *Reflections on the Importance and Distribution of Riches*. Smith spent a lot of time talking with François Quesnay and other leading Physiocrats, who were then at the height of their prominence. He met Helvetius. He visited Voltaire in Geneva. Most important, he began to

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study the economic policies of the French state, which he, like some of the Physiocrats, found irrational. The French tax system, for example, required that peasants remit about four-fifths of their income to the government. As Bagehot later commented, "On all economic matters the France of that time was a sort of museum stocked with the most important errors."

After almost three years in France, the Buccleuch group returned to London in late 1766. For a few months Smith gave advice (almost certainly not followed) to Charles Townshend, who as chancellor of the exchequer was in the process of framing his unfortunate policies for the American colonies.

In 1767, Smith went home to his mother's house in Kirkcaldy. There, for six uninterrupted years, he worked relentlessly on the manuscript of *The Wealth of Nations*—day after day, week after week, without stint and with intense pleasure. A self-styled "solitary philosopher," he spent this entire period working alone, "in great tranquility, and almost in complete retirement" from other diversions. A close student of rhetoric and an uncompromising devotee of revision, Smith rewrote the text again and again, and yet again. Many times he brought his book to the verge of completion, only to decide on still another revision or the inclusion of even more material. He remained an obsessive reviser throughout his life. "I am a slow a very slow workman," he later wrote his publisher, "who do and undo everything I write at least half a dozen times before I can be tolerably pleased with it." In 1773, he returned to London to consider a second tutorial trip abroad, which he did not take, and to arrange at last for the publication of his manuscript.

Yet the book did not see print for three more years still. The reason, in addition to Smith's procrastinations and his torturous redrafts, was the development of new material on two subjects: the management of universities, on which he held strong views; and British policy toward the deteriorating situation in the American colonies. Finally, in 1776, the year in which the colonies declared their independence and also the year in which Bentham completed his *Theory of Legislation* and Gibbon brought out his first volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Smith's great book appeared. He was the same age—fifty-two years, nine months—as John Maynard Keynes was when *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* was published in 1936.

An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations was offered for sale in two volumes at a combined price of one pound sixteen shillings, the equivalent of about $120 today. The length of the first print run is not known, but it sold out in six months. Smith's friends were elated. "I am much pleas'd with your Performance," wrote Hume, "and the Perusal of it has taken me from a State of great Anxiety. It was a Work

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of so much Expectation, by yourself, by your Friends, and by the Public, that I troubled for its Appearance; but am now much relieved." Gibbon exclaimed, "What an excellent work is that with which . . . Mr. Adam Smith has enriched the public! An extensive science in a single book, and the most profound ideas expressed in the most perspicuous language." Hugh Blair, an Edinburgh cleric who had long used Smith's ideas in his sermons, wrote him that *The Wealth of Nations* "exceeded my expectations. One writer after another on these Subjects did nothing but puzzle me. I despaired at ever arriving at clear Ideas. . . . I do think the Age is highly indebted to you, and I wish they may be duly Sensible of the Obligation. . . . Your work ought to be, and I am perswaded will in some degree become, the Commercial Code of Nations." Blair was persuaded correctly. It did.

Adam Smith lived for fourteen years after 1776, long enough for his fame to spread into the New World. He spent most of these years quietly in Edinburgh, serving as a Commissioner of Customs and Salt Duties, an appointment he probably won through the influence of the Duke of Buccleuch. In this post he earned the handsome salary of £600 per year in addition to the £300 he still received from Buccleuch. His "present situation," as he wrote in 1780, "is therefore as fully affluent as I could wish it to be."

Smith's routine during this period was dominated by meetings of the Board of Commissioners, but in his free time he worked on new editions of *The Wealth of Nations* and, even more thoroughly, of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Despite worsening health, he completed very extensive revisions of the latter book in 1789. The new edition was published in the spring of 1790. By then Smith's health was declining rapidly. On a Sunday evening in mid-June of the same year, he spent a pleasant few hours with a group of friends, as was his custom. When he left the room to retire, he said, "I love your company, gentlemen, but I believe I must leave you—to go to another world." He died a few days later.

III

The Wealth of Nations is a very substantial tome. Its half a million words are organized into five "books": three of nearly three hundred pages each, one just over one hundred, one about fifty. The analytical core appears in the first two books, which total about four hundred pages. The rest is concerned with the history, description, and analysis of the mercantile system, colonial administration, jurisprudence, education, and tax policy.

Smith's prose adhered to his preferred "plain style," with copious and vivid illustrations from everyday life. Although the book was written

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more than two centuries ago, it remains strikingly easy to read, and one finds it difficult not to feel grateful for Smith's assiduous redrafts and revisions. Woodrow Wilson once said that Smith "was a great thinker,—and that was much; but he also made men recognize him as a great thinker, because he was a great master of style—which was more." Ronald Coase has written that Smith's prose is "very different from that of most modern economists who are either incapable of writing simple English or have decided that they have more to gain by concealment." John Kenneth Galbraith, who knows something about prose style himself, said of Smith, "Few writers ever, and certainly no economist since, have been as amusing, lucid, or resourceful—or on occasion as devastating."

Over the last two centuries, many commentators on *The Wealth of Nations* have emphasized the *systematic* nature of Adam Smith's contribution. The salient virtue of his book is its demonstration—argued with conviction and often presented in very precise terms—of how everything in economic life is related to everything else, and how every relationship can be understood on the basis of a few general principles. Smith was one of the first to take the crucial step of isolating economic problems from politics and making them independent subjects for study.

Beyond his systematic approach, Smith caused at least two other basic reorientations of economic thought. First, he elevated concern for national income ("produce") over that for accumulated wealth ("treasure"). Second, he implicitly added the idea of per capita wealth and income to that of aggregate. As the English economist Edwin Cannan once put it, "We are accustomed to think of Switzerland or of Denmark as a rich nation compared with Russia. But it was a great break with tradition in 1776."

The organizing principle of Smith's analytical economics is, of course, self-interest: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." Today self-interest remains the chief assumption employed in mainstream analysis, the most frequently used tool in the economist's toolbox, perhaps even the toolbox itself. As George Stigler observes, Smith's "construct of the self-interest-seeking individual in a competitive environment is Newtonian in its universality."

Beyond self-interest, the modern reader is struck by how many other key analytical ideas are presented in *The Wealth of Nations*. Without being comprehensive, one can enumerate the following: the circular flow of economic life, equilibrium theory, opportunity cost, the division of labor, differential compensation, rent-seeking behavior, agency the-

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ory, the concept of public goods, and the theory of second-best. To this day, these ideas remain the stock-in-trade of economic analysis.

Few if any of them were wholly original with Adam Smith. Most had appeared in one form or other no later than the seventeenth century and early eighteenth, a fertile period of analysis by dozens of innovative writers. Schumpeter goes so far as to say that *The Wealth of Nations* "does not contain a single *analytic* idea, principle, or method that was entirely new in 1776." Whether or not this is accurate, it seems clear that Adam Smith was primarily a systematizer and synthesizer—a developer rather than a pioneer. Schumpeter himself, who regarded the difficult Léon Walras (1834–1910) as the greatest of all economists, makes the interesting comment that, given the infancy of the discipline in Adam Smith's time, his defects amounted to virtues. "Had he been more brilliant, he would not have been taken so seriously. Had he dug more deeply, had he unearthed more recondite truths, had he used difficult and ingenious methods, he would not have been understood. . . . He never moved above the heads of even the dullest readers." Smith's writing, Schumpeter goes on to say, is memorable because of its incomparable richness of illustration. "The facts overflow and stumble upon one another," with the author "heating" them "till they glow."

Of course, *The Wealth of Nations* is very far from an unblemished performance. It contains plenty of major conceptual errors: the notion that capital employed in agriculture yields the highest returns, the ascription of superior usefulness to domestic trade over foreign trade or shipping, the implicit labor theory of value. "The last of Smith's regrettable failures," Stigler adds, "is one for which he is overwhelmingly famous—the division of labor. . . . [A]lmost no one used or now uses the theory of division of labor, for the excellent reason that there is scarcely such a theory. . . . [T]here is no standard, operable theory to describe what Smith argued to be the mainspring of economic progress."

Without quarreling in the slightest with the greatness of *The Wealth of Nations,* I want to underscore two interrelated characteristics of Adam Smith's approach: his units of analysis and his attitude toward organizations. Together, these tend to limit his usefulness for the study of business enterprise and of national economic systems as they have evolved in our own time. It is here that he is most vulnerable to the intellectual challenges represented by Hamilton, List, and other economic nationalists.

In modern writing on business and economics, the researcher might reasonably choose among numerous potential units of analysis: the individual, the firm, the industry, the market, the policy, the macroeconomy, the transaction, the event, the locational cluster, the innovation, the externality, economic growth, or any of several others. All are

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legitimate objects of study, though perhaps not equally esteemed in present-day mainstream economics.

Adam Smith is decidedly more interested in three of these units than in the others. First, he exhibits a lively concern with supply and demand in markets. The primacy of market competition in his system derives from the fact that transactions among distant buyers and sellers cannot be affected by sympathy, one of the bases of his ethical system set forth in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. As Coase remarks, in the absence of sympathy, the competitive discipline of markets uses "the strength of self-interest to offset the weakness and partiality of benevolence, so that those who are unknown, unattractive, or unimportant, will have their wants served."

Smith's second distinctive unit of analysis is policy, as in his prolonged passages attacking mercantilism. Eli Heckscher, the leading scholar of mercantilism, once called this part of *The Wealth of Nations* "an emphatic piece of free trade propaganda." But much more than mercantilist policy is analyzed. About two-thirds of the book's total of one thousand pages are concerned with detailed investigations of economic policies in different countries at different epochs.

Third, and most conspicuously, Adam Smith is committed to the study of the individual. The word *individual*, like *natural* and its cognates, occurs hundreds of times in the text of *The Wealth of Nations*. Yet here Smith's construct is not the individual with a unique soul, that favorite subject of philosophy and literature. Smith's individual is less a shaper of society than an isolated unit reacting predictably to external stimuli. Little autonomy is ascribed to the individual, and no uniqueness. To Adam Smith, people are fungible. All are governed by their "human nature," which was for him, as for many other eighteenth-century writers, a foreordained, immutable, and scientifically discoverable congeries of attitudes and propensities. There is almost no notice of behavioral diversity deriving from nationality, ethnicity, gender, stage of life, or endowment with talent and intelligence. Instead, the conduct of the individual is governed solely by "human nature," and human nature is the same in every human being.

This is not to say that Smith posited an abstraction called *homo oeconomicus* for the purpose of model building. The concept of economic man was a creation of the nineteenth century, not the eighteenth. It was certainly not the conceit of Adam Smith, who, unlike Ricardo, was no builder of abstract models. His own fullest statement about human nature, which appears in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, does not privilege self-interest over sympathy or the impartial spectator as a determinant of human action. Yet Smith *is* interested, to the point of obsession, in human nature, and in discovering (and celebrating) the

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"natural order." As is evident in many passages, he is acutely offended when "institutions" distort "the natural course of things."

IV

Adam Smith does not just *prefer* to focus on individuals and human nature. He goes much further than this. He exhibits a powerful aesthetic aversion to any type of collective action, a visceral distaste bordering on revulsion. For him, "human institutions" so invariably produce "absurd" results that they have no presumptive legitimacy.

Many writers have commented on Smith's dislike of "merchants and manufacturers," who are routinely castigated throughout *The Wealth of Nations*. Here I am arguing a broader point: that he not only despised the "monopolistic" spirit of businessmen, but that he also had a profound hostility to any type of organized activity. He denounced politicians, professors, craftspeople, and churchmen just as vehemently as he did businessmen. When operating in concert, all are depicted as incorrigible rent seekers, scheming to extract more than a fair market price for their services. All are infected with the same "corporation spirit" subversive of the "natural order of things" and hostile to "the system of perfect liberty."

It is true that in the opening pages of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith extols the division of labor as the prime mover in economic growth. He speaks in glowing terms of "the assistance and co-operation of many thousands." Yet in a book of one thousand pages and half a million words, he says nothing about how this cooperation is to be encouraged, let alone organized. Jacob Viner observes that for Smith the only effective voluntary associations were those "of merchants and manufacturers to exploit the consumer and of masters to exploit the worker."

When Smith does concentrate on organizations—whether guilds, business corporations, universities, political groups, or religious orders—his verdict is uniformly and passionately negative. Most organized groups were, in his view, rent-seeking "corporations." In a discussion of methods used by such groups to extract more than their proper share, he writes, "It is to prevent this reduction of price, and consequently of wages and profit, by restraining that free competition which would most certainly occasion it, that all corporations, and the greater part of corporation laws, have been established."

In Smith's world, something rotten is likely afoot wherever two or more individuals are gathered together, except as family members or in the unambiguous roles of buyer and seller. Even when people meet for "merriment and diversion," if they happen to be of the same trade a "conspiracy against the public" is in the offing. And when merchants and

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manufacturers cannot accomplish their nefarious purposes alone, they turn to government for help. "This [mercantilist] monopoly," Smith writes, "has so much increased the number of some particular tribes of [manufacturers], that, like an overgrown standing army, they have become formidable to the government, and upon many occasions intimidate the legislature." When this happens, the public interest is compromised and politics itself becomes sullied: "The sneaking arts of underling tradesmen are thus erected into political maxims for the conduct of a great empire."

As James F. Becker once wrote in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, Smith viewed "all clubs, cliques, cabals, joint stock companies, trading companies, and other social guilds as corporations having in common certain properties that render them positively harmful, or, at best, of dubious social utility. . . . There is the implication that the mixture of authority and corporation is somehow dangerous but not a clue as to why this is so." Smith's "organizational solution" to these problems, Becker writes, is for "free, individual competition and a limited governmental agenda," a solution almost identical with that of John Locke a century before and one plainly insufficient to an effective engagement of modern industrial problems.

V

Why did Adam Smith see things this way? Galbraith facetiously suggests that, "handicapped by his environment," he "judged all races by the Scotch (as we are correctly called) and their much celebrated tendency to self-seeking recalcitrance." More likely, Galbraith speculates, he simply "failed to see the pride people could have in their organization." Yet his prejudice was so pronounced that it must go deeper than this.

Aside from his social clubs, Adam Smith had no significant first-hand experience with any substantial organizations except universities. As a student, he had unhappy encounters with the Oxford faculty, and this left an indelible impression: "In the university of Oxford," he wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*, "the greater part of the public professors have, for these many years, given up altogether even the pretence of teaching." Smith himself had been a professor at the University of Glasgow for twelve years. He had also served as Dean of the Faculty (1760–62) and Vice-Rector (1762–64) during a period of tangled administrative problems at the university.

In the eighteenth century, as now, few universities were paragons of organizational virtue. Then as now, many professors essentially got away with murder. They often exploited the system, working only when they

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felt like it. They behaved like a privileged caste, blithely living off the university's endowment. Small wonder that any close student of such a system, especially one like Smith prone to skepticism, would not readily give other organizations the benefit of the doubt.

A second and more telling reason for Smith's anti-organizational bias is his curious and perhaps willful obliviousness to the industrial revolution. It is true that the age of machine production was just beginning, and perhaps we might excuse him, as we cannot excuse classical economists of the nineteenth century, for failing to grasp its significance. Yet two additional circumstances underscore Smith's culpability here. First, he was such an acute and up-to-date observer of other phenomena, such as the protean situation in the American colonies, that his relative ignorance of technology seems more than a little strange. Second, numerous other writers, especially in the 1750s and 1760s, did detail the wonders of technological innovation. These include Josiah Tucker, Arthur Young, Sir James Steuart, Malachy Postlethwayt, and sometimes even Samuel Johnson.

By contrast, there are only a couple of pages on machinery in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith makes extended references to the division of labor in his illustrative pin factory. But he makes no mention at all of such crucial inventions as Hargreaves's spinning jenny (1767), Arkwright's water frame (1769), or James Watt's steam engine. Watt, who worked as an instrument maker at Smith's own University of Glasgow, first began to tinker with the Newcomen steam engine in 1763, and the Newcomen engine itself already had been in use for two generations. Watt made his breakthrough improvements in 1765, patented them in 1769, and entered his famous partnership with Matthew Boulton in 1775. By the late 1770s, water pumps powered by Boulton and Watt engines were in common use in the tin and copper mines of Cornwall.

By the time Smith's third and much expanded edition of *The Wealth of Nations* appeared in 1784, mechanized textile mills had sprung up and steam engines were no longer a novelty item. In revising his book for the third edition, Smith took pains to add, as he put it in a letter to his publisher, "a full exposition of the Absurdity and hurtfulness of almost all our chartered trading companies." Yet there is still little mention, here or in the fourth edition (1786) or fifth (1789), of the technological innovations that were working a radical change in economic life—and nowhere more than before his very eyes in Great Britain. "There is virtually no mention of cotton textiles," Charles Kindleberger observes, "only one reference to Manchester in a list of cities, nothing on pottery, nothing on new methods of producing beer. . . . [Nor does Smith] discuss the spread of coal in industrial use." Another economist, R. Koebner, makes a similar argument. He sees Smith as "strikingly grudging"

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toward the one or two leaps in productivity noted in *The Wealth of Nations*. He speculates that the reason why Smith missed the point of the industrial revolution derived from his low opinion of businessmen's motives. Whatever the reason, the industrial revolution was the most important of all the things Smith was absentminded about, and the robustness of his analysis suffers grievously as a result.

VI

For Adam Smith, only agriculture was fully "natural." This was why he was so offended by mercantilism, which was based on a very different premise. In mercantilist thought, not only are trade and manufacturing just as "natural" as agriculture, but they are also more productive of wealth and power. For Smith the trouble is that they require careful organization and the intrusion of his despised "human institutions." His bias for agriculture, which he seems to have developed at an early age, could only have been reinforced by his conversations with Quesnay and other Physiocrats during his sojourn in France in 1764–67. (Acknowledging Smith's "unequivocal" error in preferring agriculture to industry, Stigler quips that "there is no such thing as a free trip to Paris.")

Of many examples in *The Wealth of Nations* showing Smith's preference, the following is representative: "Country gentlemen and farmers are, to their great honor, of all people, the least subject to the wretched spirit of monopoly. The undertaker of a great manufactory is sometimes alarmed if another work of the same kind is established within twenty miles of him. . . . Farmers and country gentlemen, on the contrary, are generally disposed rather to promote than to obstruct the cultivation and improvement of their neighbours' farms and estates." Smith's line of thinking here mixed economic analysis with political and ethical considerations, and even with aesthetic preferences.

His reasoning led him to reduce the industrial revolution to nothing more than the division of labor. This meant no key roles for such elements as machine production, fuel and water power, human entrepreneurship, state promotion of manufacturing, and, most important of all, technology. As Hiram Caton recently wrote in the *Journal of Economic History*, "To admit that technology harnessed natural forces—the critical insight of industrial production—would have established the primacy of manufacture to agriculture and destroyed the whole fabric of the 'natural order' by the machinery of art." This Adam Smith could not accept.

Smith's laissez-faire, based as it was on agriculture's exclusive title to "naturalness," represented nothing less than a system directed against

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the central thrust of industrial capitalism. With a few exceptions, the classical economists who followed him in the next two generations of English economic thought did little to correct his myopia. Continuing to focus on static analysis and to promote free trade and minimal government, they forbore to study entrepreneurship, manufacturing technology, the factory system, or the anatomy of economic growth. This way of thinking became so entrenched that it may not be too much to say that it remains the preferred stance of mainstream neoclassical economists down to the present day, some two centuries after the death of Adam Smith.

Of course, alternative approaches did appear soon after Smith's death. Catón points out that scholars have focused on one of these alternatives, socialism, to the unfortunate exclusion of the other, the "industrial critiques" of Alexander Hamilton, Friedrich List, and a few others:

> Hamilton blazed the trail that List was subsequently to follow. He reaffirmed mercantilism, aware of the classical alternative and critical of it. . . . Hamilton wrote three years after Smith issued the last edition of *The Wealth of Nations.* Smith never remarked the novelty of industrial production nor considered the new factor of exponential economic growth that it introduced. Hamilton underscored its potential in remarking the "prodigious effects" obtained by bringing "artificial force . . . in aid of the natural force of man."

Of all the early "industrial" critics of Smith, the most systematic was List, the German nationalist who lived in the United States during the 1830s and absorbed Hamiltonian principles of positive government for the promotion of manufactures. Returning to Europe and seeing state intervention as the only way to unify the dozens of independent German principalities, List evangelized in favor of a customs union, protective tariffs for infant industries, and public development of a national railway network. List's long treatise, *The National System of Political Economy,* though it contains important errors of both theory and fact, is an uncommonly effective engagement and critique of the Smithian system. As Caton writes, "List was the first economist to base all his doctrine on the proposition that manufacture differs 'fundamentally' from agriculture or trade because it stood essentially in a positive feedback relation to science." The enormous gains in per capita income from manufacturing as opposed to agriculture would produce "not only a fundamentally different orientation on the economies of modern nations, but also an espousal of capitalism with good conscience."

If this line of analysis is correct, and I believe it is, then Adam Smith's intellectual relevance to modern industrial capitalism becomes problematical and in need of reconsideration.

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VII

A third reason why Smith suppressed any inquiry into the morphology of organizations had to do with his fear of organized power, which might distort or even destroy his "system of natural liberty." Of course, he conceded the need for a legal framework to protect property rights and individual freedoms. Little in his system of natural liberty could operate in the absence of civil authority. But he did not go much beyond this. He remained a passionate advocate of minimal regulation for either the promotion or restriction of economic activity. Innumerable passages in both *The Wealth of Nations* and Smith's surviving letters practically scream out his exasperation with the "absurd" policies of activist governments throughout Europe.

Nothing in Smith's writings suggests any basic dissatisfaction with the stratified nature of society or with the British constitution, which he praised as the world's best. Himself the beneficiary of lucrative patronage from Shelburne and Townshend, he endorsed his age's habits of deference. He was no democrat, and seems not to have minded that, like the great majority of his fellow citizens, he could not vote. (Fewer than 5 percent of adult males then had the franchise.) Smith believed that poverty will always be with us, and he defined "the poor" and "the common people" as 99 percent of the population. As for the presumed effects of the laissez-faire policies Smith advocated, the economist Harvey Chisick notes "that he was thinking in terms of an improvement which might be represented as a movement from six to eight on a scale of ten. Now there is a real and significant measure of improvement in its own terms. But it is nothing like the impact of the Industrial Revolution, which cannot be represented on such a scale at all."

Smith accepted existing social rankings. He saw no need for, and some danger in, rival hierarchies based on new money of commercial and industrial origin. His abundant commentary in *The Wealth of Nations* on the superiority of agriculture to trade and industry, his obsessive preoccupation with "the mean rapacity, the monopolizing spirit of merchants and manufacturers," suggests that he spoke more for the old order than the new. To the extent that this preference had implications for his analytical framework, it meant that he must favor agriculture over industry, exchange over development, and getting prices right over actively promoting economic growth.

Most important of all, it meant that his entire system of proscribing "monopoly" by insuring the maximum number of competitors had the serendipitous and remarkable result of finessing the issue of power altogether. Smith's "system of natural liberty," refined by later classical and neoclassical economists into the formal, easily mathematicized

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system of "perfect competition," implicitly denies the reality of power. In a system of perfect competition, which includes perfect resource mobility, numberless buyers and sellers in frictionless markets, and possession by all participants of perfect information and perfect rationality, the issue of power cannot arise.

For the intellectual historian, this aspect of the Smithian system and of the perfect competition model represents an arresting phenomenon. The tenacious strength and resilience of the model, in both its primitive Smithian articulation and its twentieth-century refinement as the foundation of static equilibrium analysis, are evidence of a commanding paradigm, but also of the predilections of that paradigm's adherents. Since buyers and sellers are unable to affect the market under perfect competition, they are by definition bereft of economic power. To the extent that economic power underlies political power—and that, of course, is to a very great extent indeed—then the Smithian marketplace solves, all by itself, the eternal problem of the distribution of power. It thereby excludes from consideration such problems as exploitation, abuse, and the entire agenda of man's inhumanity to man. Like all utopian schemes for the elimination of power from the list of human problems, this exclusion has an almost irresistible appeal. If only it can be implemented, if only "market imperfections" can be eliminated, then psychic relief waits just around the corner.

Smith's own acute discomfort with power could hardly be more apparent. *The Wealth of Nations* brims over with relentless, sweeping denunciations of the "stupid" and "absurd" results of the actual exercise of power. Again and again Smith asserts that harmful consequences ensue whenever power is used to alter the "natural" course of economic life. As the economist Nathan Rosenberg writes, Smith is convinced that "the possession of power inevitably leads to the playing of zero-sum games" in which the application of power will help its user but hurt others. All of this implies that, for Smith, organizations represented both sources of power and manifestations of its reality. It says that for him, individuals and markets are "natural," but institutions and organizational hierarchies are not.

For many of his professional descendants, as well as for Smith himself, this kind of preference was not merely a choice of technique. Instead, it was a full-blown exhibition of an aesthetic preference, and perhaps of naïveté as well. It expressed a visceral feeling that agriculture is good, industry is bad, small is beautiful, big is bad, individuals and markets are good, organizations and hierarchies are bad. And it derived more from simple prejudice than from scientific analysis.

Even today, after several industrial revolutions, long after it has become obvious that complex organizations lie at the heart of the

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fantastic economic growth that has occurred since Smith's time, ample evidence of pervasive dislike for organizations persists. Contempt for bureaucracies runs so deep in the popular consciousness that denouncing them is like shooting fish in a barrel. Even in modern economics, the animating force of most models remains the individual's utility function. Mainstream neoclassicism has very great difficulty coping with organizations, including business firms. It addresses the issue by assuming a profit-maximizing entity indistinguishable from Adam Smith's self-interested individual. It ignores a vast literature in history, sociology, and other disciplines that shows beyond doubt that organizations do not usually behave as individuals do and that groups of varying sizes have different patterns of behavior.

In this sense as in so many others, Adam Smith emerges as the bender of the twig that became the tree of modern economic analysis. To a surprising extent his prejudices and propensities remain those of modern economists in the mainstream neoclassical tradition. Just as Christopher Columbus's geographical misconception survives today in our five-century-long conceit that native Americans are "Indians," just as the fallacious identification of the womb as the source of nervous collapse survives in the word *hysteria*, so the anti-organizational bias of the founder continues to shape economic analysis.

VIII

As the bedrock assumptions of economic analysis are reconsidered in our own time, it is appropriate to begin by rethinking Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*. For all Smith's unquestionable greatness, his feet were of clay when it came to the study of organizations. For us, with two hundred years of experience he himself lacked, it is not permissible to be as absentminded about the industrial system as he was, nor as reflexively hostile to organizations.

Aside from its intrinsic intellectual interest, a rethinking of Smith is timely today because economic nationalism is on the rise. The commercial and industrial competitors of the United States, notably Japan and Germany, often act from a premise that the key unit of analysis is not the individual but the nation-state. Conscious of the indispensable roles in national growth played by firms, industry groups, and elite public-sector ministries—in a word, *organizations*—Japanese and German bureaucrats and business managers have been able to deploy resources so as to achieve stronger economic performance.

In doing this, they have concentrated less on the individual as consumer than on the organization as producer. They have typically allocated a greater percentage of GNP to investment and less to con-

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sumption than have their counterparts in the United States, where during the 1980s Adam Smith's influence reached its two-hundred-year peak. For Smith himself, writing in the eighteenth century, there was no good way to anticipate this divergence across countries. The industrial revolution was just starting, and his own preferred unit of analysis was the individual. As he wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*:

> Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer. The maxim is so perfectly self-evident, that it would be absurd to attempt to prove it. But in the mercantile system [of deliberate national economic development], the interest of the consumer is almost constantly sacrificed to that of the producer; and it seems to consider production, and not consumption, as the ultimate end and object of all industry and commerce.

Historically, Smith's logic held up so long as the individual remained both the consuming and the producing unit. But in the modern world, the great majority of production is done not by individuals but by complex organizations. In this kind of system, the simplicity of automatic exchange between individual producers and consumers—the premise that underlies Smith's entire system—almost disappears.

In all countries today, the major actors in the production sector must plan their investments on the basis of lengthy (five- to ten-year) time horizons. Even for enormous Japanese and German manufacturing firms, "time-to-market" for new products is usually measured not in weeks or months but years. Consequently, large investments must be made long before there is any return from sales to the consumer. This in turn means that *investment* by the producers, because it is so far removed in time from ultimate consumption, must be attended to in careful, deliberate fashion. It cannot be left to the whims of individuals, who will usually act in their own short-term self-interest, as Smith correctly argued. It must be done through organizations; and it is best done with the positive assistance of wise public policy.

Over the last two decades, the consumption-investment trade-off has become strikingly polarized across countries. The United States at one extreme favors consumption. Japan at the other puts relatively greater emphasis on investment. This remarkable national divergence provides the clearest statistical index of what is happening in the competition between different types of capitalism, even more than do the widely publicized statistics on fiscal and trade deficits.

As Keynes demonstrated long ago, investment does not occur as automatically as Adam Smith believed, and as his neoclassical descendants in government and the academy continue to believe. The trouble

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now, somewhat as in the 1930s, is not primarily with the economy itself but with what Keynes then called "the immaterial devices of the mind." For the modern neoclassical theorist or the slavish devotee of the "free market," it is uncommonly difficult to tune out the siren song of Adam Smith. It is hard to look beyond ideology and elegant models to see the world as it really is, a world in which capitalism of the Smithian variety is being consistently out-performed.

The German and Japanese economic systems today are just as market-oriented, just as "capitalistic," as is the American. But they are far less centered on the individual. Their architects, less fearful of deliberate applications of national economic strategies, less convinced that "human institutions" inevitably produce "absurd" results, are intellectual legatees not of Smith but of Hamilton and List. In consequence, they are ideologically better prepared to compete in the modern world economy. That economy is dominated by phenomena that Hamilton and List analyzed and embraced but that Adam Smith either ignored or abhorred: nationalism, technology, organization, and power.

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The Grammar of Light

CAROL ANN DUFFY

Even barely enough light to find a mouth,
and bless both with a meaningless O, teaches,
spells out. The way a curtain opened at night
lets in neon, or moon, or a car's hasty glance,
and paints for a moment someone you love, pierces.

And so many mornings to learn; some
when the day is wrung from damp, gray skies
and rooms come on for breakfast
in the town you are leaving early. The way
a wasteground weeps glass tears at the end of a street.

Some fluent, showing you how the trees
in the square think in birds, telepathize. The way
the waiter balances light in his hands, the coins
in his pocket silver, and a young bell shines
in its white tower ready to tell.

Even a saucer of rain in a garden at evening
speaks to the eye. Like the little fires
from allotments, undressing in veils of mauve smoke
as you walk home under the muted lamps,
perplexed. The way the shy stars go stuttering on.

And at midnight, a candle next to the wine
slurs its soft wax, flatters. Shadows
circle the table. The way all faces blur
to dreams of themselves held in the eyes.
The flare of another match. The way everything dies.

✪ CAROL ANN DUFFY's poetry appears in the London *Times Literary Supplement*.

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Scott Fitzgerald and Edmund Wilson

A Troubled Friendship

JEFFREY MEYERS

EDMUND WILSON HAS USUALLY BEEN PERCEIVED as a "father figure," a staunch friend and an enthusiastic supporter of Scott Fitzgerald. In the only essay on their friendship, William Goldhurst in *F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Contemporaries*, has written: "From the beginning [Wilson] offered Fitzgerald guidance and encouragement, and did much to infuse into the fledgling a feeling of self-confidence and assurance." This view is primarily based on Wilson's fine editorial work on Fitzgerald's posthumous books, *The Last Tycoon* and *The Crack-Up*, published when Fitzgerald was no longer a rival and a threat.

During Fitzgerald's lifetime, however, before Wilson became the magisterial old man of letters, his private and public criticism of Fitzgerald's character and work was often very harsh. Far from encouraging Fitzgerald's talent, Wilson's criticism sometimes seemed intent on destroying it. The supportive-destructive nature of Wilson's criticism had its source in their tense and ambivalent friendship, which began at Princeton and continued until Fitzgerald's death in 1940. During that time, Wilson assumed the role of stern tutor to a brilliant but wayward disciple.

In 1940 Vladimir Nabokov arrived in America and (in many respects) replaced Fitzgerald in Wilson's emotional and intellectual life. Wilson helped Nabokov publish his work at the beginning of his American career. But when the pupil no longer needed the lesson of the master, the talented beneficiary once again aroused Wilson's jealousy and became his rival and adversary. During the 1960s Wilson repeated the pattern he had established with his Princeton disciple, turning against Nabokov and quarreling with him as he had done with Fitzgerald.

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Fitzgerald's overpraised early novels brought him extraordinary fame and wealth at a time when Wilson, his senior, was still trying to establish himself as a journalist and critic. Fitzgerald's popular and financial success gallingly underscored the contrast between their characters and talents. To Wilson the critic, Fitzgerald's early work provided an exhilarating challenge, an opportunity to participate in his friend's creative work. At the same time, Fitzgerald's fiction revealed to Wilson, an aspiring novelist, the relative paucity of his own fictional gifts. Wilson's competitiveness and confidence in his critical astuteness were fed by Fitzgerald's habit of self-abasement before those he considered his moral and intellectual superiors. Although Wilson met Fitzgerald's requests for advice about his work with intelligent insight, such requests created a fund of animosity and resentment that Wilson often revealed in an ugly, public way. Reluctant, like most men, to recognize the genius of a slightly younger contemporary, Wilson subtly and perhaps unconsciously tried to pull him down. As Max Perkins shrewdly observed: "Edmund Wilson would give his eyeteeth to have half the reputation as a novelist that Scott Fitzgerald has."

Wilson was often prickly, ungracious, and contemptuous toward Fitzgerald. Though he sometimes inflated Fitzgerald's worst work, his remarks tended to range from qualified praise to brutally frank, even malicious criticism. Fitzgerald, content to remain a disciple and always eager to learn, listened patiently to this often salutary but sometimes merciless commentary. As Leon Edel wrote introducing Wilson's *The Twenties*: "He respected Edmund too much to want to be seriously hurt." But Fitzgerald exacted revenge in his fiction. It was no coincidence that the head of the appalling bond firm in *The Beautiful and Damned* and the man who killed Jay Gatsby were both named Wilson.

Hemingway, who would write his own subtly denigrating portrait of Fitzgerald in *A Moveable Feast*, was also well acquainted with the destructive side of Wilson's criticism. Still angry about Wilson's essay in *The Wound and the Bow*, which had argued that Hemingway's creative work originated in some hidden psychological weakness, in 1950 Hemingway warned Arthur Mizener, Fitzgerald's first biographer, about the baneful influence of Wilson's egoistic and self-serving criticism. He noted in a letter of May 12, 1950, that Wilson was "an excellent critic about many things but he has strange leaks in his integrity." To Hemingway, Wilson's shrewdness as a critic was counterbalanced by his disloyalty and destructiveness. Wilson's negative criticism of Fitzgerald showed that he failed to recognize his greatness until after he was dead. Wilson's response was always tempered by his lack of respect for Fitzgerald's character, his envy of his charm and worldly success, his dismay that true creativity could be manifested in so unworthy a person.

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Born in New Jersey in 1895, the son of a Princetonian who was a brilliant trial lawyer and a sometime attorney general of the state, Wilson was a solid member of the eastern gentry. Haughty and aloof, Wilson attended the Hill School, graduated from Princeton with an outstanding record in 1916, and served overseas with the ambulance corps in World War I. Fitzgerald, impulsive and open, was born in St. Paul a year later, the son of a genteel failure and the embarrassingly eccentric daughter of a self-made Irish immigrant. He attended an obscure Catholic prep school, flunked out of Princeton (without even learning to spell), and spent the war years in American army camps. Plain in appearance, the stocky, auburn-haired Wilson was intellectual and sternly rational, stiff and self-conscious. The dazzlingly handsome Fitzgerald had an imaginative and intuitive mind, a spontaneous and impetuous approach to experience.

At Princeton Wilson had all the advantages. A year ahead of Fitzgerald and editor of the *Nassau Lit.*, he heavily edited Fitzgerald's one-act play "Shadow Laurels" and his story "The Ordeal" and published them in the college magazine in 1915. They collaborated that year on a musical comedy for the Triangle Club, Wilson writing the book and Fitzgerald the lyrics for *The Evil Eye*. It was understood between them that Fitzgerald was the brash, superficial upstart, destined to make a splash but perhaps also doomed to fail, while Wilson was the solid intellectual who would set him straight.

In 1916 Wilson and his classmate John Peale Bishop published a satiric poem that put the popular but cheeky Fitzgerald, who had failed out of college, in his proper place. They contrasted his shallowness to their own substantial intellects, and deflated his flashy cleverness, superficial reading, derivative cynicism, and unworthy ambition by having Fitzgerald exclaim:

> I was always clever enough
> To make the clever upperclassmen notice me;
> I could make one poem by Browning,
> One play by Shaw,
> And part of a novel by Meredith
> Go further than most people
> Could do with the reading of years;
> And I could always be cynically amusing at the expense
> Of those who were cleverer than I
> And from whom I borrowed freely,
> But whose cleverness
> Was not of the kind that is effective
> In the February of sophomore year. . . .
> No doubt by senior year
> I would have been on every committee in college,

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But I made one slip:
I flunked out in the middle of junior year.

After college and military service, both young men embarked on literary careers in which they contrived to act out their familiar roles with each other. Wilson was the first to move to New York, where he shared an apartment in Greenwich Village and worked for the *New York Evening Sun*. When Fitzgerald visited him in 1919 Wilson seemed to embody the ideal literary life. He had been transformed from "the shy little scholar of Holder Court" into a promising symbol of cosmopolitan life. "That night, in Bunny's apartment," Fitzgerald recalled in *The Crack-Up*, "life was mellow and safe, a finer distillation of all that I had come to love at Princeton . . . and I began wondering about the rent of such apartments."

Thereafter, Wilson became Fitzgerald's literary mentor. He discussed the art of the novel with Fitzgerald, urging him to pay more attention to form. He commented on Fitzgerald's work before publication, and wrote reviews that helped him to define his art. Fitzgerald regularly deferred to Wilson's literary judgment, appeared to surrender his intellectual conscience to his mentor (he called Hemingway his "artistic conscience"), and yet, in Wilson's view, sacrificed his integrity by publishing trashy stories in popular magazines. Wilson's uneasy role was exacerbated by their common belief that the novel was a higher and more valuable form of endeavor than literary criticism. Wilson longed to be a creative writer, but his great knowledge and appreciation of the literature of the past inhibited his creative urge. He made his living as a literary journalist. In April 1919 Fitzgerald sharply defined the difference in their talents and careers by presciently warning Wilson, who would become an accomplished anthologist: "For God's sake, Bunny, write a novel and don't waste your time editing collections [of war stories]. It'll get to be a habit."

Soon after they left college, Wilson recalled, Fitzgerald had presumptuously declared: "I want to be one of the greatest writers who ever lived, don't you?" Assuming his familiar Johnsonian persona with the Boswellian Fitzgerald, Wilson in "Thoughts on Being Bibliographed" contrasted (as he had done in his undergraduate poem) his own high intellectual standards with those of his bumbling disciple, who took a long time to mature: "I had not myself quite entertained this fantasy because I had been reading Plato and Dante, Scott had been reading [the Princetonian] Booth Tarkington, Compton Mackenzie, H. G. Wells [both of whom influenced his early novels] and [the intoxicating rhythms of] Swinburne; but when he later got to better writers, his standards and his achievement went sharply up, and he would always have pitted himself against the very best in his own line that he knew." Wilson failed to

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acknowlege that Fitzgerald, despite his naïveté, had actually achieved his fantasy by learning from his older contemporaries instead of pitting himself (as Wilson had done) against impossible standards.

After Fitzgerald's death, Wilson sought to explain his dual role as supporter and attacker by asserting that this part had been forced upon him by Fitzgerald. In "A Weekend at Ellerslie," Wilson wrote that Fitzgerald "had come to regard himself as somehow accountable to me for his literary career. . . . It was his own artistic conscience that accused him, but this was beginning to make our meetings uncomfortable." Wilson thus echoed Fitzgerald's own admission in *The Crack-Up* (1936) that "for twenty years a certain man had been my intellectual conscience. That was Edmund Wilson." Despite Wilson's fundamental hostility, he always remained Fitzgerald's ideal reader. As Wilson told John Peale Bishop in a letter of January 2, 1941, two weeks after Fitzgerald's death: "Men who start out writing together write for one another more than they realize till somebody dies."

Wilson helped Fitzgerald get started in New York by introducing him to George Jean Nathan, who, in the fall of 1919, published his first stories (written as an undergraduate) in the *Smart Set*. When Fitzgerald completed the first draft of *This Side of Paradise*, he naturally sought Wilson's opinion. Wilson responded, as usual, with friendly derision, backhanded compliments, and discouraging faint praise. He compared Fitzgerald's novel to the trivial best-seller by the adolescent Daisy Ashford, spotted the influence of the hero of Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*, mocked Fitzgerald's intellectual pretensions, offered sound criticism, and warned him in a letter of November 21, 1919, about preferring popularity to serious art:

> I have just read your novel with more delight than I can well tell you. It ought to be a classic in a class with *The Young Visiters*. . . . Your hero is an unreal imitation of Michael Fane, who was himself unreal. . . . As an intellectual [Amory] is a fake of the first water and I read his views on art, politics, religion and society with more riotous mirth than I should care to have you know. . . .
>
> It would all be better if you would tighten up your artistic conscience and pay a little more attention to form. . . . I feel called upon to give you this advice because I believe you might become a very popular trashy novelist without much difficulty!

In 1922, Wilson opened his review of the novel with his usual put-down: Fitzgerald "has been given imagination without intellectual control of it; he has been given a desire for beauty without an aesthetic ideal; and he has been given a gift for expression without any ideas to express." Though Wilson clearly had the intellectual control, aesthetic ideals, and abundant ideas, it was Fitzgerald who had somehow blun-

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dered into the creation of a phenomenally popular novel. Trying to account for this surprising critical success, Wilson praised the book's vitality: "I have said that *This Side of Paradise* commits almost every sin that a novel can possibly commit: but it does not commit the unpardonable sin: it does not fail to live. The whole preposterous farrago is animated with life."

Evaluating the work of Thomas Wolfe, another Scribner author, in the late 1930s, Fitzgerald echoed Wilson by telling his Hollywood secretary: it "doesn't commit the cardinal sin; it doesn't fail to live." But Wilson himself had probably been echoing the tinge of patronage in Ford Madox Ford's judgment of D. H. Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock*: "It's got every fault that the English novel can have. . . . But, you've got GENIUS." Later on, in *The Crack-Up*, Fitzgerald expressed his irritation and resentment of Wilson's severe criticism of his youthful work. He admitted that there was an element of intellectual pretentiousness in the novel, but defended its essential truth and integrity: "A lot of people thought it was a fake, and perhaps it was, and a lot of others thought it was a lie, which it was not."

In 1920 Fitzgerald was riding high on his newfound wealth and fame as spokesman for the postwar generation, and he had fulfilled Wilson's prediction that his shallowness would make him a popular success. Wilson, still toiling as an obscure journalist, found other ways to attack him. He now became as critical of Fitzgerald's personal faults as he was of his literary failings. Burton Rascoe, writing in the New York *Tribune*, quoted Wilson's gratuitous remark that Fitzgerald mispronounced more words than any other educated person that Wilson had ever known. Wilson and John Peale Bishop, whose creative work was also eclipsed by Fitzgerald's, drew up a satiric catalogue for a "Proposed exhibit of Fitzgeraldiana for Chas. Scribner's Sons." These items—which reflected Fitzgerald's immaturity, vanity, shallowness, narcissism, and undistinguished military career (Bishop, like Wilson, had served in Europe)—consisted of three double malted milks, a bottle of hair tonic, a yellow silk shirt, a mirror, his entire seven-book library (including a notebook and two scrapbooks), and an "overseas cap never worn overseas." The yellow silk shirt anticipated Gatsby's exhibition of his wardrobe; the overseas cap was cunningly adopted by Fitzgerald in *The Crack-Up*. Though emotionally vulnerable, Fitzgerald usually tolerated Wilson's sharp criticism with good-natured resignation.

Fitzgerald had good reason to put up with Wilson's attacks. He was being well paid for his work and perhaps understood Wilson's envy. He also knew that he was not an intellectual novelist and, though his popular stories were hastily composed, that his style and subject matter were his own. He must have instinctively known that his work derived

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from his personal faults and emotional crises. His role as passive target was, moreover, fundamental to his relationship with Wilson. Had he become angry and broken with him, he would have lost access to Wilson's harsh but stimulating criticism. Fitzgerald undoubtedly acquiesced in Wilson's most spiteful remarks.

Fitzgerald submitted his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, for Wilson's comments in 1921 just as he had done with *This Side of Paradise* in 1919. In February of that year Wilson told his friend Stanley Dell that he was impressed by Fitzgerald's ability to describe the seeds of destruction in his marriage: "I am editing the MS of Fitz's new novel and, though I thought it was rather silly at first, I find it developing a genuine emotional power which he has scarcely displayed before. . . . It is all about him and Zelda." Fitzgerald would finally and fully portray their mutual destruction, after his alcoholism and her insanity, in *Tender Is the Night*.

Wilson must also have been pleased by his brief but flattering appearance in Fitzgerald's second novel *The Beautiful and Damned* as Eugene Bronson, "whose articles in The New Democracy [i.e., *The New Republic*] were stamping him as a man with ideas transcending both vulgar timeliness and popular hysteria." Continuing his practice of commenting negatively on Fitzgerald's personal as well as literary life, Wilson also reported in a March 25 letter to Stanley Dell that Zelda (whom he liked) was "offended by the [assumed] cynical indifference of Fitzgerald to the baby," and that alcohol had aged his handsome profile as experience had tempered his mind: "He looks like John Barrymore on the brink of the grave . . . but also, somehow, more intelligent than he used to."

Fitzgerald had by now learned to absorb Wilson's criticisms without flinching. After reading Wilson's review of his first two novels in March 1922, Fitzgerald told George Jean Nathan that he had actually enjoyed the cruel dissection. Wilson had shown him the typescript before publication, and Fitzgerald, appreciating the serious analysis, modestly accepted the criticism. Though he asked Wilson to delete references to his drinking and his criticism of the war, which would have offended Zelda's parents, he told him: "It is, of course, the only intelligible and intelligent thing of any length which has been written about me and my stuff—and like everything you write it seems to me pretty generally true. I am guilty of its every stricture and I take an extraordinary delight in its considered approbation. I don't see how I could possibly be offended at anything in it"—though Wilson clearly feared he well might be. Less confident and resilient authors might have been seriously discouraged by the review, but Fitzgerald, mining the scrap of praise, was particularly pleased by Wilson's conclusion in "Literary Spotlight: F. Scott

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Fitzgerald" that "*The Beautiful and Damned,* imperfect though it is, marks an advance over *This Side of Paradise*: the style is more nearly mature and the subject more solidly unified, and there are scenes that are more convincing than any in his previous fiction."

Fitzgerald brought out collections of stories soon after the publication of his novels to capitalize on the success of his more ambitious works. In *Vanity Fair* of November 1922, Wilson, reviewing *Tales of the Jazz Age*, concluded that Fitzgerald had advanced in his short fiction, as he had in his novels: "Scott Fitzgerald's new book of short stories . . . is very much better than his first [*Flappers and Philosophers*]. In it he lets his fancy, his humor and his taste for nonsense run wild . . . though he still suffers from the weakness of not focusing his material sufficiently."

Despite his previous strictures about shallow, formless works, Wilson actually enjoyed and encouraged Fitzgerald's stories about silly, vain young people, perhaps still appreciating the undergraduate jokes they had written together. Wilson's misplaced delight in this kind of writing led him to inflate the merits of Fitzgerald's worst full-length work, *The Vegetable, or From President to Postman: A Comedy in Three Acts.* Fitzgerald once told Wilson that "he had looked into Emily Post and had been inspired with the idea of a play in which all the motivations should consist of trying to do the right thing." In this play, a drunken railroad clerk suddenly becomes president of the United States and, after a predictable series of disasters, finally finds his true calling as a postman. Wilson, who had admired Fitzgerald's fantasy when they collaborated on a musical comedy, showed for the first time real enthusiasm for his work. He told Fitzgerald that *The Vegetable* was "one of the best things you ever wrote" and "the best American comedy ever written." Unwittingly encouraging the weakest aspect of Fitzgerald's talent, Wilson urged Fitzgerald "to go on writing plays."

Wilson, then married to the actress Mary Blair, also tried to help place the play in New York. When it was published in 1923, after a dismal theatrical failure in Atlantic City the previous year, Wilson stuck to his earlier judgment, calling it in his *Vanity Fair* review "A Selection of Bric-a-Brac," "a fantastic and satiric comedy carried off with exhilarating humor. . . . I do not know of any dialogue by an American which is lighter, more graceful or more witty." In gratitude for Wilson's support, Fitzgerald dedicated the play to his childhood friend Katherine Tighe and to "Edmund Wilson, Jr. / Who deleted many absurdities / From my first two novels I recommend / The absurdities set down here."

The following year, Wilson cast the critical debate between himself and Fitzgerald into the form of an imaginary conversation, after the style of Walter Savage Landor, between the critic Van Wyck Brooks and Scott Fitzgerald. In "Imaginary Conversations," Wilson portrayed himself as

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the careful, thorough, learned, and scholarly Brooks, who "knows far more about American literature than anybody else in the world," and gave Brooks all the best lines. The critic freely censured Fitzgerald for haste, superficiality, and commercialism; for writing too much and too fast; and for allowing himself to be corrupted by such high-paying magazines as the *Saturday Evening Post*. This influential and frequently reprinted essay contained some useful admonitions, but it made Fitzgerald look foolish and shallow, outclassed by the heavyweight critic.

In 1924 Wilson also reviewed Hemingway's Three Mountains Press pamphlet *in our time*. He told Fitzgerald about Hemingway and inspired their meeting in Paris, just after the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, in April 1925. Wilson's recognition of Hemingway coincided with his perception that Fitzgerald had produced his first fully realized work, *The Great Gatsby*. He was gratified to discover that Fitzgerald had followed his advice and moved from a loose, subjective novel to a unified, impersonal one. Though he did not review the novel, whose significance at that time was not generally recognized, Wilson told him in a letter from April 11, 1925, with his usual qualifications: "It is undoubtedly in some ways the best thing you have done—the best planned, the best sustained, the best written."

Four years later, in a crucial letter to the novelist Hamilton Basso, Wilson, with uncommon modesty, unfavorably contrasted his own recently published novel, *I Thought of Daisy* (their fictional heroines had the same name), to Fitzgerald's best work of fiction. For the first time, but privately, he acknowledged Fitzgerald's superiority and placed his achievement on a national rather than on a merely personal level. In Wilson's May 9, 1929, letter to Basso, he wrote: "[I've been] thinking with depression how much better Scott Fitzgerald's prose and dramatic sense were than mine. If only I'd been able to give my book the vividness and excitement, the technical accuracy, of his! Have you ever read *Gatsby*? I think it's one of the best novels that any American of his age has done." Five years later Fitzgerald included Wilson's minor novel among "Good Books That Almost Nobody Has Read."

Wilson continued to be obsessed with Fitzgerald's charming but narcissistic personality. His attitude toward him—a mixture of condescension and envy, admiration and dislike—remained as ambivalent as it had been in college. In Wilson's "The Crime in the Whistler Room" (1924), which appeared in the same volume as the imaginary conversation between Fitzgerald and Brooks, Fitzgerald appears as a handsome, dissolute, and rather uneasy fellow (like "Barrymore on the brink of the grave") who has the same transparent self-centeredness that Wilson had satirized in his Princeton poem. He is "an attractive young man with a good profile, who wears a clean soft shirt and a gay summer tie, but looks

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haggard and dissipated. . . . His manner . . . alternates between too much and too little assurance, but there is something disarmingly childlike about his egoism."

Between 1924 and 1931, when Fitzgerald lived mostly in Europe and Wilson inevitably saw less of him, Wilson became more tolerant of his personal behavior. Later on, he even defended Fitzgerald's drunken prank with the wealthy and pretentious wife of John Peale Bishop. "I know that he wrote on Margaret Bishop's dress with a lipstick," he told Dos Passos. "But did he do this more than once?" Though Fitzgerald could be boorish, he gradually came to embody the glamour and romanticism that Wilson merely dreamed of. In a March 3, 1950, letter to Arthur Mizener, Wilson nostalgically recalled the vitality of the handsome young man and his beautiful wife: "The remarkable thing about the Fitzgeralds was their capacity for carrying things off and carrying people away by their spontaneity, charm, and good looks."

Wilson's tolerance was stretched to the breaking point, however, in February 1928 during his weekend at Fitzgerald's magnificent house, Ellerslie, outside Wilmington. Fitzgerald wanted to revive their friendship, which had suffered a certain chill when he began to need appreciation much more than advice. "The aftermath of a Fitzgerald evening was notoriously a painful experience," Wilson remarked in his lively memoir "A Weekend at Ellerslie." "Nonsense and inspiration, reckless idealism and childish irresponsibility," he wrote, "were mingled in so queer a way." The weekend—like most of their meetings—was chaotic, disappointing, and intensely irritating.

Their relations remained cool for the next five years, while Zelda had her first breakdowns and Fitzgerald struggled to complete *Tender Is the Night*. After the tensions between them had almost led to a rupture, Wilson attempted to escape the pontificating role that Fitzgerald's behavior demanded. In January 1933, after Hemingway had achieved great success with *A Farewell to Arms* and Fitzgerald's career was stagnant, he turned up drunk for a dinner with Hemingway and Wilson in New York. In a review of Morley Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris*, Wilson recalled how Fitzgerald had humiliated himself with Hemingway—as he had done on previous occasions with Dreiser, Conrad, Joyce, and Edith Wharton.

Fitzgerald's behavior shocked Hemingway and Wilson, the two notorious drinkers, who would never have used their drunkenness as an excuse to degrade themselves. In his review, Wilson mentioned the incident to illustrate Fitzgerald's self-humiliation, which enabled him to excuse his own failings and attack others without provoking retaliation. "The last time I ever saw [Hemingway]," Wilson wrote in "That Summer in Paris," "I had dinner with him and Scott Fitzgerald. Hem-

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ingway was now a great man and Scott was so much overcome by his greatness that he embarrassed me by his self-abasement, and he finally lay down on the restaurant floor, pretending to be unconscious but actually listening in on the conversation and from time to time needling his hero, whose weaknesses he had studied intently, with malicious little interpolations."

Fitzgerald belatedly apologized in a letter to Wilson of February 1933. He completely agreed with Wilson's interpretation of his behavior, and tried to explain his uneasy relationship with Hemingway: "I came to New York to get drunk and swinish and I shouldn't have looked up you and Ernest in such a humor of impotent desperation. I assume all responsibility for all unpleasantness—with Ernest I seem to have reached a state where when we drink together I half bait, half truckle to him."

In a letter of December 4 of that year, Wilson protested to Fitzgerald about the similar falsity in *their* friendship. Weary of perpetuating the roles they had adopted in college, Wilson acknowledged his share of responsibility: "What I object to is precisely the 'scholar and vulgarian,' 'you helped me more than I helped you' business. I know that this isn't entirely a role you've foisted on me: I've partly created it myself."

Just as Wilson chafed against Fitzgerald's obsequious persona, so Fitzgerald finally tried to assert his independence by rejecting Wilson's critical pronouncements. The previous October, Fitzgerald had written, for Wilson's *New Republic*, an unusually sensitive and poignant obituary of his cynical friend Ring Lardner. Jealous of Fitzgerald's friendship with and admiration of Lardner, Wilson criticized the rather rhetorical conclusion of the piece: "I thought the phrase 'great and good American' sounded like a political speech. Lardner . . . wasn't exactly great, was he?" Though Fitzgerald did not answer this comment directly, he no longer accepted Wilson's infallibility. He had perceived Wilson's hostile attitude and defended the title he had provided for Lardner's collection, *How to Write Short Stories*, by defiantly stating: "You are wrong about Ring's book. My title was the best possible. You are always wrong—but always with the most correct possible reasons." Though Wilson had the inevitable reservations about *Tender Is the Night*, which was published in 1934, he thought Fitzgerald had "got something real out of the marriage relationship" of Dick and Nicole Diver.

Fitzgerald saw Wilson (then married to Mary McCarthy) for the last time in the fall of 1938, when he took Sheilah Graham to visit his old friends on the East Coast. Struck once again by the great and sudden change in Fitzgerald, Wilson attributed his new normality and tameness to Sheilah, who had encouraged him to give up alcohol. At the same time (and retrospectively) Wilson held Zelda responsible for Fitzgerald's

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crazy behavior. But, as he told his old Princeton teacher Christian Gauss in a letter of October 27, 1938, Fitzgerald, though now calm, had also lost a good deal of his old vitality: "He doesn't drink, works hard in Hollywood, and has a new girl, who, though less interesting, tends to keep him in better order than Zelda. . . . He seems mild, rather unsure of himself, and at moments almost banal." After this meeting, Fitzgerald, who had lost his self-confidence after a series of personal tragedies and disastrous experiences in Hollywood, resumed his youthful role as Wilson's disciple. "Believe me, Bunny," he wrote on May 16, 1939, stressing as always Wilson's superior intellect, "it meant more to me than it could possibly have meant to you to see you that evening. It seemed to renew old times learning about Franz Kafka and latter things that are going on in the world of poetry, because I am still the ignoramus that you and John Bishop wrote about [in the poem] at Princeton."

Wilson's intellectual influence continued until the end of Fitzgerald's life. When working with Budd Schulberg on the screenplay for *Winter Carnival* in February 1939, he frequently and respectfully referred to Wilson in their conversations. While trying to develop his political awareness in the troubled 1930s, Fitzgerald would sit in the California sunshine reading Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire* "like an eager sociology student bucking for an A in Bunny Wilson's class in social consciousness." Despite his apparent political naïveté, Fitzgerald resisted the Zeitgeist. He never swallowed, as did the more sophisticated Wilson, the illusory bait of Communism. As he shrewdly told Perkins, while attempting to explain Wilson's gloom: "A decision to adopt Communism definitely, no matter how good for the soul, must of necessity be a saddening process for anyone who has ever tasted the intellectual pleasures of the world we live in."

Just after hearing about Fitzgerald's death in December 1940, Wilson stressed, in a December 27 letter to Zelda, his closeness to Fitzgerald, who seemed to represent an aspect of his own character that had somehow failed to develop: "I feel myself as if I had suddenly been robbed of some part of my own personality." Deeply moved by Fitzgerald's death and perhaps remorseful that he had not fully reciprocated his friendship and appreciated his genius, Wilson attempted to make amends for his blindness and occasional cruelty by becoming the guardian of Fitzgerald's posthumous reputation. In February and March 1941, Wilson commissioned for the *New Republic* critical essays on Fitzgerald by Dos Passos and Glenway Wescott and an elegy by John Peale Bishop. By editing and supplying the title for Fitzgerald's unfinished Hollywood novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941), and compiling his uncollected essays, notebooks, and letters (more than half of them to Wilson) in *The Crack-Up* (1945), Wilson was primarily responsible for the remarkable revival of Fitzgerald's languishing reputation.

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Writing to Perkins on February 16, 1941, Wilson ignored the portrayal of psychiatry in *Tender Is the Night* and rather grudgingly conceded that *The Last Tycoon* was "the only one of Scott's books that shows any knowledge of any field of human activity outside of dissipation." Wilson's two-page foreword called it "Fitzgerald's most mature work" and "the best novel we have had about Hollywood." Though his criticism was cursory, Wilson's reconstruction of Fitzgerald's notes, which suggested how the fragmentary novel would develop and conclude, was absolutely brilliant.

Wilson's editorial work on *The Crack-Up* was also extensive and important. He told Perkins that he had hated Fitzgerald's confessional essays (as he had disliked *The Beautiful and Damned*) when they first appeared in *Esquire* in 1936. They must have reminded him, in a menacing way, of his own alcoholism and nervous breakdown. But he admitted in his February 16 letter to Perkins, after Fitzgerald's death, that "there was more truth and sincerity in it, I suppose, than we realized at the time." Perkins did not agree with Wilson, however, and the valuable and influential book was eventually brought out by New Directions. This volume included, in addition to Fitzgerald's work, admiring letters to him from Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Wolfe, and John Dos Passos; essays by Dos Passos, Paul Rosenfeld, and Glenway Wescott; and poems by Bishop and Wilson. (Hemingway was conspicuously absent.)

Wilson's elegy in heroic couplets, written in Wellfleet on Cape Cod in February 1942, was influenced by the description of the Atlantic gale in Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter." At the start of the poem Wilson mentions that he had edited his friend's works from the very beginning until the very end of Fitzgerald's literary career. His life's work, it seemed, was to correct that errant genius. Even in this memorial poem, however, which served as the "Dedication" to *The Crack-Up,* Wilson portrays him in a narcissistic and degrading moment. At Princeton Wilson had once found him with

> Pale skin, hard green eyes, and yellow hair—
> Intently pinching out before a glass
> Some pimples left by parties at the Nass;
> Nor did [he] stop abashed, thus pocked and blotched,
> But kept on peering while I stood and watched.

The poem concludes more sympathetically by returning to the once emerald and now dead eyes of his lost friend:

> Those eyes struck dark, dissolving in a wrecked
> And darkened world, that gleam of intellect

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That spilled into the spectrum of tune, taste
Scent, color, living speech, is gone, is lost.

After Fitzgerald's death his imperfect work had, for Wilson, almost the look of a classic. His final judgment, in a paragraph added in 1945 to his foreword to *The Last Tycoon*, was that "Fitzgerald will be found to stand out as one of the first-rate figures in the American writing of the period." While preparing *The Crack-Up*, Wilson, referring to Fitzgerald and Bishop, honestly told Christian Gauss in a letter of May 15, 1944, "I was more fortunate than either of them, not in gifts, but in the opportunity to survive." But Wilson, who outlived Fitzgerald by thirty-two years, survived as a critic. Fitzgerald, with Wilson's ambivalent help, survived as an artist.

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One Heart's Canon

SUZANNE RHODENBAUGH

I HAVE READ AND HEARD AND BEEN TOLD, on excellent authority, that poems—if they *are* poems—must have transcendence; sincerity; epiphany; emotion; precision; a story line, however faint; relevance; memorability; urgency; necessity; empathy; generosity; figurative language, especially metaphor; universality; rhythm; form, however defined; image; intimacy; ambition; economy; thought; drama; intensity. I've heard they must be of tradition and must break tradition. I've heard that, like well-wrought laws, they must speak of, for, and to people, and in a distinctive voice. I've heard their subject must include language itself.

Sometimes the identifiable germ, as it were, that makes a poem a poem has been defined in such a way as to give me pause and cause me to consider whether poems I've loved (not to mention poems I've written) indeed have that germ. I enjoy discussions and debates and polemics about poetry's essence, and about its ways and means and schools and trends. I like surveys of it, and assertions about it, especially bold ones. I read articles and essays and reviews and books that attempt to nail down, in one fashion or another, what the slippery body Poetry *is*, and therefore how we may know it. Then, I shut my anatomy books, go outside, and fall in love with whichever poems attract me. And of course there's no accounting for love.

Naturally many poems simply haven't come into the range of my experience: I haven't read them. The majority I have read have left no mark, made no impression. Others I've admired for their skill or imaginativeness, but haven't found admiration turning to love. A few, to mix the senses, are indelible: they echo. These are ones I'll never forget, maybe because they came into my life at some critical, or at least memorable, juncture, and contributed to my own life story, the one I'm making up as I go.

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Shortly after I graduated from college twenty-five years ago, when I began a period of extended uprootedness, I copied on notebook paper, in the loopy chubby script I wrote at age twenty-one, the poems I needed. These were poems I thought to carry with me, though my books might be left behind while I ventured to some new job or travel. The poems were "Chaplinesque" by Hart Crane, "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" by Wallace Stevens, "Spring and Fall" by Gerard Manley Hopkins, "River Roses" by D. H. Lawrence, "Musée des Beaux Arts" by W. H. Auden, and "The Darkling Thrush" by Thomas Hardy.

I carried others in my heart—some line or series of lines, some image, some title. I might have had to return to a college anthology to find them, but they affected me enough not to forget them. These included "Fire and Ice" and "Acquainted with the Night" by Robert Frost, "The Song of Wandering Aengus" and "A Prayer for My Daughter" by Yeats, "To Autumn" by John Keats, "Domination of Black" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Stevens, "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night" by Dylan Thomas, and several poems by Hopkins, among them "God's Grandeur," "Pied Beauty," and "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark." I remembered Emily Dickinson's "zero at the bone," "The soul selects her own society," and "Because I could not stop for Death."

I used the poems in my personal canon to live. As I turned to work as an administrator and organizer in programs related to poverty, civil rights, or labor, and grew in my conception of "the political," I returned many times to "The Second Coming," "Musée des Beaux Arts," "Fire and Ice," "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night," and "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark." The poems functioned for me both as totems of the size and complexity of the phenomena I was up against or struggling with, and as odd sources of enablement or empowerment. There wasn't comfort in them, but rather embodiment, especially via metaphor, of "the whole untraceable world-event," in Martin Buber's term, that I was trying to understand and, in a small way, affect. Many times, in a city neighborhood or in a rural area of the south or Appalachia, or contemplating the movement in national politics, Yeats's phrase would come to me: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." I wanted to be "the best" *with* "passionate intensity," and as I saw some effort to rectify a wrong, or make for greater opportunity, fail, or dissipate to misspent focus, or move toward the outright venal, I read "The Second Coming" as a prophecy having full force for the present. I suppose I cut an absurd or pathetic figure at times: a low-level federal functionary quoting Yeats to my superiors; or a mid-level medical program manager in the coal fields, exhorting my colleagues to "Rage,

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rage against the dying of the light." The poems were real to me, though, and integrated with my life as necessities.

Other poems in the small group of my canon I used in a more personal way, as sources of solace: "Chaplinesque," "A Prayer for My Daughter," "The Darkling Thrush," "Acquainted with the Night," and "Spring and Fall" were among these.

A third way I used the poems was to re-energize or enliven myself. When worry with work especially seemed to have deadened me, made me into little more than a manipulator and organizer of paperwork, budgets, and people, poems brought life to me, reminded me that there were dimensions of experience shut out in the dailiness. "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "River Roses," "Pied Beauty," "To Autumn," and "The Song of Wandering Aengus" were such poems for me. I'd been taught that poetry was inexhaustible, and I found it to be so.

Strangely, I did very little to expand my canon. I fairly voraciously read new fiction and non-fiction, but for poetry relied on my little canon, reading it over and over. I seldom bought a poetry book, or checked one out of the library, or bought or subscribed to literary magazines. I tried sometimes to write poetry, but I wasn't reading it, at least not beyond my canon.

At some point, I did buy *The Imagist Poem*, a small anthology edited by William Pratt, which had been published in 1963. From this book additional poems entered my canon: Amy Lowell's "A Lady" and "A Decade," Carl Sandburg's "Monotone," Stevens's "Valley Candle," Ezra Pound's "April." I also bought *My House* by Nikki Giovanni; the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay; *Ariel* and *The Colossus and Other Poems* by Sylvia Plath, whose poetry I'd come to through her prose in *The Bell Jar*; and poems of Tennessee Williams, D. H. Lawrence, and Samuel Beckett, all writers whose work in other genres had interested me.

Often I'd go back to a college anthology called *Modern Poetry*, Volume VII, edited by Maynard Mack, Leonard Dean, and William Frost, the second edition of which had been published in 1961. It featured Hopkins, Yeats, Frost, T. S. Eliot, and Auden, and included a sampling of others. My tattered copy had belonged to two other students before me and contained the notes of all three of us. I felt a somewhat mystical attachment to this book, as the container and guide to almost all I needed to know or read in poetry. I seldom expanded the range of what I read in it, but I did find more as I grew older, such as Yeats's "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing." I suppose because I couldn't then imagine work coming to nothing, this poem had escaped my attention while I was between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one.

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That poem, plus Plath's "The Rival," those from *The Imagist Poem*, and a few sonnets by Millay expanded a little my canon. It included now, too, a poem by Peter Wild that I'd read in a magazine, one whose phrase about a fox, "in his head were lanterns of orange," I couldn't forget.

When in January 1985 I entered a Master of Fine Arts in Writing program, it had been nearly twenty years since I'd read at all widely in poetry. Still clutching and re-reading my personal canon, I had no idea what the shape, trends, and concerns of American poetry had been since the first few decades of the century.

This was both to the bad and to the good. It was good in that my standards for poetry ran to the likes of Hopkins and Yeats. I counted on this level of mastery, this intensity; I demanded it in what I read. It was also to the good in that my reading wasn't influenced by knowledge of who or what in contemporary poetry was supposed to impress me. But it was to the bad in two senses. First, I resisted or railed against much of the post-modern and contemporary poetry I encountered. I was reading and hearing mostly contemporaries now, whose work had not been winnowed by time, and I was holding them to standards of masters. At first I couldn't see poems as "a trying," an always-imperfect trying that live poets are in the midst of, and from which they may produce—if they are extremely lucky—two or three poems that last. Second, for my own writing, my ignorance proved an extreme disservice. I had little idea of the many options available, the multifold possibilities for poem making. I knew that I hadn't written my own "Song of Wandering Aengus," but I thought I was proceeding unsullied, and that experience in life—which I felt I had aplenty—was mainly what I needed.

Then came poems—thousands of them in books, anthologies, magazines, readings—and thinking about poems—critical studies, histories, lectures. For two and a half years I lived immersed in poetry and little else.

I began to cast a very different eye on individual poems, on the span of any one poet's work, on the thing Poetry itself. I was learning, among much else, that poetry is a lifelong matter, that nothing less than a lifetime is needed for even dipping a toe in it, as reader or writer.

Yet some poems were entering my personal canon, becoming poems I needed for living. I knew they were entering my canon when I recalled them in non-literary contexts, when I sent them to friends in trouble or sorrow or celebration, when I recommended them to composition students as helpful for living, when I returned to them for cheer or fortification or just to loll my tongue around their syllables.

With some poets, I can't now so much select a poem or two as go back to a whole book, for the whole saying there. I re-read all or parts of

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Maxine Kumin's *Our Ground Time Here Will Be Brief*, Sharon Olds's *The Dead and the Living*, James Wright's *Shall We Gather at the River* and *The Branch Will Not Break*, William Stafford's *Stories That Could Be True*, Peter Meinke's *Trying to Surprise God*.

I return to Kenneth Patchen's "Biography of Southern Rain"; Stafford's "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," "Aunt Mabel," "Connections," and "A Family Turn"; Carole Oles's "A Manifesto for the Faint-Hearted"; Louis Simpson's "The People Next Door"; Philip Levine's "The Conductor of Nothing," "For Fran," and "Animals Are Passing from Our Lives"; Donald Hall's "Names of Horses"; Stephen Dunn's "The Carpenter's Song" and "Nova Scotia Chronolog # 5"; Gerald Stern's "Lucky Life"; Jack Myers's "The Gift" and "Coming to the Surface"; Pattian Rogers's "The Determination of the Scene" and "The Hummingbird: A Seduction"; Philip Dacey's "Form Rejection Letter"; Anna Akhmatova's "Instead of a Preface"; Toi Derricotte's "The Choice" and "Fears of the Eighth Grade"; Frank O'Hara's "My Heart"; David Bottoms's "Under the Vulture-Tree"; Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays"; Mona Van Duyn's "The Ballad of Blossom"; Rainer Maria Rilke's "The Grown-up."

I've learned, which seems an astonishingly obvious thing to take twenty years to find out, that the world of poetry is inexhaustible not just with respect to any one poem, which can be read and loved over and over, but also with respect to poetry's multifariousness, its bounty. I've learned that every conceivable subject or tone or theme or setting has, somewhere, been addressed by some poet, and that there are almost infinite options as to poetic strategy, and the sum called "style."

Maybe this is backwards or upside-down from the way writers and readers learn today. That is, maybe the young today—especially those in university writing programs—learn more about poetry's bounty as a genre than they learn about any one poem's bounty; I don't know. Whether from some proclivity of character, undergraduate training, or something else, my eye was attuned to the close shot long before it considered the wide-angle.

Perhaps the sum of this amounts to a grand not-knowing, to saying that personal canon formation is entirely idiosyncratic, and therefore has nothing at all to do with considerations of how, in society, we form literature's "canon," which is now so much in dispute. The personal, the idiosyncratic, may be a poor or exactly wrong analogue for the societal. I could say I love colors in the red spectrum, the flavor of almond, the smell of quince, and the saying might be as relevant, which is to say, irrelevant. But regardless of the implications, if any, for canon formation, maybe there is some usefulness in trying to see the strands in the way one person's canon is formed, or just in seeing that such a personal canon exists.

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I did read poems during a long period in my life when I was not primarily engaged in writing, not living in the literary world, not teaching. My clutching of a small group of poems may seem crabbed or bizarre, but nevertheless poems did matter to me.

It's true I'd been an English major as an undergraduate, had known poets among faculty and students, and was myself trying to write. Still, the content and torque of my life did not revolve around poetry for the better part of twenty years. I wasn't reading my canon for writing models, or as academic work, or as preparation for teaching, or to be "current" on literary matters. Rather, simply, I needed the poems. They made sense of, and made fuller, the life I was living. This tells me that poetry can be essential in people's lives even in today's America.

I see this confirmed when I send a poem or a poetry book to a friend. Most of my friends are not writers or academics and don't follow poetry. Most of them are well-educated, middle-aged, middle-class people, in a wide variety of professional jobs, who read newspapers, magazines, and books of fiction and non-fiction, but not poetry. Yet I frequently hear back that the poem or book engaged them and moved them. I saw this, for example, when a friend wrote that no consolation, after her father's death, meant as much as the rightness of Amy Lowell's poem "A Lady," and when friends choose to use in their wedding ceremony Robert Bly's poem "Listening to the Köln Concert."

Especially in important times in people's lives, poems can be essential. Poetry adds a dimension of spirituality to our otherwise mostly secular lives; it posits community with other human beings; and it says to people: *someone is recording all this*. It is as if there's comfort and joy in the record making, in the imputation of meaning this implies.

I believe poetry would be read more if somehow it intersected more naturally and more frequently with people's lives. People don't walk into a bookstore or grocery store or book section of a department store or even a public library and see the latest "hot" book of poetry prominently displayed, as they do with fiction and non-fiction. They don't see poetry advertised or promoted in general-interest publications or the mass media, and they don't often see poetry reviewed, not even in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the like. For them to encounter poetry, they must be virtual poetry mavens.

I therefore think it is possible that it isn't contemporary poetry's tepidness or irrelevance—though there's much to these charges—that keeps poetry isolated in the university and the literary world, but that, in practical terms, poetry does not often intersect with people's daily lives.

The poems in my earliest, most essential canon were all written by that now-beleaguered figure, the white male of European roots. During

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the period I was clutching this canon, poetry's means—magazine and book publishing, readings and so on—were opening to women, and to blacks and other minorities. What I admitted to my later canon was written by a more diverse group of poets, I think because these means were now more open to a wider range of voices. Thus my earliest canon may be instance that an exclusionary or too-narrow casting of the net inevitably produces a too-narrow canon.

At the same time, it's true that what draws me to a poem enough to canonize it has very little, if anything, to do with commonality I might have with the poet as to gender, race, ethnicity, or other marker of "identity." I notice, for example, that many of the contemporary poets I most admire are Jewish. I am not Jewish, and I'm also a generation younger than such poets as Maxine Kumin, Philip Levine, Gerald Stern, and Louis Simpson. Similarly, I'm a fifth-generation southerner, and a woman, but neither regional ties nor gender seems to be a strong source of connection. And the poet whose work has spoken to me the most powerfully, for the longest period of time, is Gerard Manley Hopkins, a nineteenth-century English Jesuit.

The most or best I can conclude is that the poem that fiercely draws my heart and mind cannot be accounted for by so narrow a consideration as commonality of identity between reader and writer; and that—equally true—I cannot know what is in the wide field of poetry to love unless past and present strictures on access to audience continue to loosen.

For the most part I canonize poem by poem: my affections and loyalties are not primarily to books, and even less to poets. I think dozens and maybe hundreds of contemporaries have each written several exquisite poems, and many have written far more such poems.

The very hugeness and welter of contemporary poetry publishing (a giant literary market, if one that seldom intersects with the mass or commercial market), along with the relative lack of culling criticism, appear to diminish and blur the fact that very fine poems are being written. There is so much poetry—so many books, so many magazines, so many award series—that keeping abreast of contemporary poetry appears impossible. And so much of that poetry is *not* keen, not fine or memorable, that it tends to swamp what is. Books, magazines, and anthologies appear to be characterized by over-inclusiveness, and individual poets appear to be publishing too much. There seems to be a "success track" operating, with an imperative for poets to publish a book every two to five years. Not even the best of our poets seem to have that much to say that often.

I have found no reliable guide to finding the best: no one magazine or award series or book series, or even small group of such, that reliably

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publishes what to me seems the finest. Such critical reviews and essays as are available do essentially nothing to winnow the field, not even for the poetry maven, and far less for the general, well-educated reader. As for salutary comments on book jackets and in ads, I've learned to discount them entirely.

Thus to find poems that may ultimately matter to me seems almost entirely a matter of luck. What I do to winnow the field of what I read is to consider, with respect to magazines, the whole content, not just or even primarily the poetry. If a magazine can be counted on to publish well-written non-fiction and fiction as well as poetry, I consider it "a better deal," and one more likely to be selective in its poetry.

What attracts me to poetry books is even less systematic or coherent. I may have read a poem (or an essay) by the poet, may have heard him or her give a reading, may have heard the poet's work praised by someone I respect, may have met the poet, may have read a discussion of the poet's work in a critical essay or book.

I know I'm more open to the work of poets I like as people, or find admirable on some ground of character I've read or heard about. On the other hand, I've found no congruence between admirable character and admirable verse, and try not to confuse them. I've known or observed some poets whose character seems shallow or reprehensible, but whose work nevertheless speaks powerfully to me and, conversely, some poets who were fine human beings but whose poetry ultimately didn't matter to me or move me. As a writer, I've found one distinction among poets: in general, women poets seem much more giving of themselves as teachers, mentors, and colleagues, more responsive and helpful. Finally, though, in canonizing I care only about the poem itself; this is my ultimate criterion as a reader, the only one that seems possible to me.

Last, I haven't found the "semi-fixed canon" among contemporaries to be very helpful in finding my own canon. As an MFA student, I read some poets because they'd been identified to me as "major" or "important." My teachers did have knowledge superior to my own, as do many critics and reviewers. Yet I found and still find that unless I'm drawn to a poet's work by some need or connection that is my own, the reading is generally not so fruitful for me, either as a person or a writer. That draw may be tenuous and instinctive, and may turn out to be wrong, but I find it some help in proceeding.

Sometimes I read poems that cause me to think, This poet has wonderful passion or vision—too bad the craft isn't sufficiently careful or developed. Much more often, I read poems that cause me to think, I don't care if this is crafted or not; there's nothing here that makes me

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want to see how the thing is formed. I find that I only care about explication, and then acknowledgment and celebration of craft when something in the poem is larger or more essential than craft, and moves me at some emotional, intellectual, or moral level.

As a result, while I enjoy critical writing, the thrust of its conclusions seldom affects what I canonize. I was told as an undergraduate, for example, that T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is the most important poem of the twentieth century, and I've been hearing it ever since, but this hasn't caused me to re-read the poem. I simply don't believe the poem; I find it overwrought; and it doesn't help me to enlarge my understanding or to live. William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow," another poem about which a deluge of words has been written, seems to me, to be oxymoronic, wildly insipid. I don't believe it either. I'm not drawn to poems that announce themselves as displays of self-consciousness, or that appear to have sprung from an agenda that preceded the poem's making.

A great deal of what is canonized in the relative short term, via critics, editors, and professors, seems to be chosen for its very need for explication. Poems accessible without critics don't seem to fare as well.

Clearly, though, I have predilections—biases—in my canon forming. My tastes go toward the romantic, toward lushness, musicality, what could loosely be called "the affirmative," even when the vision is dark. I believe life has meaning, even if it consists of nothing more than that we humans seek meaning, and I'm drawn to poems that take life seriously, so to speak, even if they're hilarious or bleak.

The poems in my canon from undergraduate days I said offered empowerment and understanding, solace, and livening. As I grew older, I sought in poetry something else as well: a source of laughter. Humor, maybe just another form of solace, has grown increasingly important to me. I don't seek it in every poem I read, of course, but it has become a necessary element in my canon's constitution.

It seems to me now that only the very young, or the irretrievably immature of any age, are entranced with sustained high tragedy, or with a tone of unremitting sorrowful or elegiac emotion. I can't grant a book admittance to the canon I re-read, or a magazine to those I read regularly, if they consistently lack humor. I find a not-trueness in this.

Finally, the poems I come to live with and love are those that, as I said at the beginning, in some way intersect with the life story I'm making. At one level, this is so obvious as to be absurd to say, but I hope the implications are larger than that I'm drawn to poems I can connect

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with by virtue of shared experience. While I can see I'm partly drawn to some poems because of my own life story—my fondness for Maxine Kumin's "The Man of Many L's," for example, partly accounted for by my long-term friendship with a woman who's severely disabled; or for Philip Dacey's "Form Rejection Letter" by the fact that I'm now ensconced in the writing life—I can't as readily account for other poems' part in my life story–making.

It may be the poems become important because they contribute to a *myth of self* I'm making, a self I long toward, one that understands more, is more generous, is kinder and wiser than I am.

I know I haven't come to the wisdom of the speaker of Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays," or Donald Hall's "Names of Horses," but I would hope to. And I'm far from being, but would like to be, like the character in Philip Levine's "The Conductor of Nothing":

> someone who can say 'Yes' or 'No'
> kindly and with a real meaning,
> and bending to hear you out, place
> a hand upon your shoulder, open
> my eyes fully to your eyes, lift
> your burden down, and point the way.

The speakers of such poems appear to be beholding Buber's "whole untraceable world-event" and encompassing or enfolding it in love, despite its contraries, cruelties, ironies, and sorrows.

In David Bottoms's "Under the Vulture-Tree," vultures' faces are likened to "the faces of the very old / who have grown to empathize with everything." This poem and perhaps most in my canon offer a stance I long for *toward life*. Nothing less than this is what I seek from poetry. Thus I believe I canonize poems partly because they help me make a story of my own, and partly because that story then becomes larger and better than I.

On public television's "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour," where the novelist Allan Gurganus was unaccountably, delightfully present one evening as a commentator on anything and everything, Gurganus summed up all of our country's present woes by saying, with startling directness and simplicity, "We seem to have forgotten our story." The poems that come into my canon help me remember or find my story. In the process, they make themselves unforgettable.

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Clerihews for the Clerisy
Or: A Quick Fix for Cultural Illiteracy

ROGER DU BÉARN

El Greco
Took a long dekko
And put his sitter in place;
Then he said: "Now pull a long face."

John Knox,
Having the pox,
Asked if Mary Queen of Scots
Showed any spots.

King Sennacherib
Was bound to crack a rib:
He came down like the wolf on the fold
When he was far too old.

F. R. Leavis
Thought it grievous
That Queenie shared his renown;
He longed for the cry of "Leavis alone!"

"Voltaire" from "Arouet"
Seems far away,
But it's nothing to the *salto mortale*
From Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali.

Fyodor Dostoevsky,
Scooting down the Nevsky,
Cried: "Think of me as of
Another brother Karamazov."

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Giacomo Leopardi
And Thomas Hardy
Both hated moony verse.
Theirs shook a fist at the universe.

Adam Smith
Was fun to be with:
Everything pleasant was planned
By an invisible hand.

Percy Bysshe Shelley
Switched off the telly,
Saying: "It isn't in a class
With my dome of many-colored glass."

Maurice Maeterlinck
Spent a night in the clink.
That rich experience spawned
Pelléas et Mélisande.

Dr. Whewell
Ran out of fuel
In the middle of a lecture,
Leaving the rest to ignorant conjecture.

Florence Nightingale,
Sneezing in a biting gale,
Said: "Damn! I've left my panacea
In the Crimea."

Ortega y Gasset
Deemed it an asset
Toward gaining instant fame
To have a double-barreled name.

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Margaret of Navarre,
Strummed on the guitar
While her bawdy friend Rabelais
Warbled *cantabile.*

John Keats
Surveyed the eats
And asked in a tone rare with him:
"Where are the bubbles winking at the brim?"

Mark Twain
(I must explain)
Wasn't a cowboy yelling "Yippie!"
He lived his Life on the Mississippi.

William Butler Yeats,
In one of his states,
Swore: "The French say I'm no *gentilhomme*:
I'm sailing to Byzantium!"

Peter Pears
Needn't give himself airs:
He gets them written
By Benjamin Britten.

René Descartes
Murmured: "For my part,
If I cogitate, it must be clear
That I am here."

Wise old Lao-Tse
Knew he knew The Way.
Had it been wiser to walk with the Buddha,
He woudda.

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Preston Sturges

The Wizard of Hollywood

DAN PINCK

The rediscovery and emergence of the comedies of Preston Sturges are warranted. His movies are perhaps the best of their kind ever made in Hollywood. As the writer and director of fourteen movies, among them *The Lady Eve*, *The Great McGinty*, and *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, Sturges introduced a wit and an off-the-wall satirical slant, mingled with an elegant sense of farce and slapstick that are unmatched in the movies. Intelligent fun was his game; his movies are as ingenuous and hilarious today, at least to an educated, over PG-13 audience, as they were in the 1940s. The wonder is that they were ever made in Hollywood, which was controlled by double-breasted, rebarbative men afraid of their own industry and any incursion of originality.

The bare bones of Preston Sturges's life—born in Chicago on August 28, 1898; died in New York, at the Algonquin, on August 6, 1959; Broadway playwright, Hollywood scriptwriter and director, songwriter, restaurateur, engineer, and inventor—are poorly covered by a brace of books about him as well as by his autobiography. Read as fantasies, some of the biographies are intoxicating; read as factual accounts, they are evasive and depressing in their accumulation of minutiae; read as novels, they offer a picaresque assortment of unreal and unbelievable marinades. There is, as we shall see, no firm reason to believe anything; but, if we accept the fantasy of his movies, we might just as well accept the fantasy of his life. If the Wizard of Oz wrote his biography, would we believe it?

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Undoubtedly, Sturges was clever, complicated, and charming, not, say, in the manner of Leonard Bernstein; for a man who made movies, he was not shallow, he was not without great talent; he invaded Hollywood with flair, he was successful for ten years or so, and then he was defeated, as all intelligent persons are in Hollywood, then and now. Wanting to meet a writer because you like his books is, as a critic said, like wanting to meet a goose because you like the paté. It might have been fun to have known Sturges; the paté of his movies is what gives us pleasure. We have to keep that in mind as we listen to his biographers.

Having myself survived a rather odd childhood (I attended sixteen different schools before the sixth grade, several of them for less than a week), I respect Sturges for accomplishing what he did. The events of his extravagantly weird childhood in the United States and Europe, superintended by a mother so bizarre and nutty as to make Edward Dahlberg's mother, Lizzie, a very proper Boston lady, compelled Sturges to filter everything into comedy, a predictable response and a sensible alternative to matricide. Mother Sturges, married five times, was not as vulgar as Dahlberg's mom, who used to urinate in doorways in view of her son and whose Star Lady Barbershop in Kansas City was a kind of a front for a whorehouse, just as massage parlors are now. Mother Sturges's venue was Paris and New York. Dahlberg said that his mother exhibited a "combination of seductiveness and neglect." Sturges, in his autobiography, says simply, "Much as I revered her, my mother was still a woman, one of that wondrous gender whose thought processes

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are not for male understanding." Mother Sturges assumed during her cohabitation with Aleister Crowley that she was a Babylonian *uhu* or call girl. She was the mother of all mothers; but Sturges considered her his dear, old mom. A few irredentist snippets about his mother indicate that but for a transgenic miracle, Sturges could easily have become a dabbling adult with short-circuited capacities.

A partial inventory of his childhood and youth is essential if we are to set our compass on his adult careers. Before the age of sixteen or seventeen, much of it spent in Europe, in and out of multiple schools and residences, Sturges had met Clemenceau, the Dolly Sisters, Monet, the king of Spain, Enrico Caruso, Isadora Duncan (his mother's sometime companion), Humperdinck, Otto Kahn, Lillian Russell, Theda Bara, Gabrielle D'Annunzio, the king and queen of Wurtenberg, L. Frank Baum (the writer of the Oz books), Aleister Crowley, Kid McCoy, Elsie Janis, Myron Herrick, Diamond Jim Brady, Marcel Duchamp, and other such cats. Sometimes he lived with his road-show of a mother, other times he lived in nearby rooming houses and hotels by himself, sometimes in reputable French boarding schools; but he never whined about his peripatetic young life that afforded him pass-through educational exposures to cultures in Paris, Berlin, Dresden, Chicago, Venice, New York, Cannes, Nice, Chicago, San Diego, Bayreuth, Zurich, Lausanne, Deauville, and London.

Mother Sturges, born Mary Dempsey, became Madame Desti, the owner of a perfumery business when she reached Paris. She considered herself an Italian princess before she called herself a *uhu*. Preston Sturges was two and a half when he first came to Paris. His real father, Edmund C. Biden, was a Midwest bill collector and trapeze artist; Preston's real name was Edmund Preston Biden. Preston met his father for the first time when Preston was fifteen and his father came calling to get recompensed for the hospital bill for Preston's birth. Solomon Sturges, his father by adoption, was a genial Chicago financier, who resembled, from a photograph in Preston's autobiography, a cross between Charles Laughton and William Casey; he was Mother Sturges's second husband and a lifelong friend of his adopted son. Solomon Sturges got syphilis at the age of seventy. By the age of fifteen, Preston was managing his mother's perfume shop. Formal or informal schooling ceased.

Many men and women have survived and even conquered disjointed and convoluted childhoods; but few have done it so confidently as Preston Sturges or used the alleged facts and traumas of the early years to make such successful careers. I'm not even certain that a man named Preston Sturges ever existed; but, assuming that the autobiography is real and that the facts noted in the attendant biographies are, too, then his early years served as an apt preparation for the script of his life as a playwright in New York and as a scriptwriter and director in Hollywood. Performing in the plays of Molière at the age of twelve is more than the equal of studying Western civilization or Victorian poetry at a community college at the age of twenty—or learning how to make and produce movies at a graduate school. The fulcrum of experience leans to the disparate residences in Europe.

But, then, how to account for engineering inventions and farsighted technical concepts that diverted him occasionally in his later years? Beginning in his early twenties in New York and carrying on in California, when he founded the Sturges Engineering Company, he displayed a remarkable inventiveness matched only by his poor judgment in not patenting many of his inventions. He designed a small car with three-point suspension and a replaceable engine in the rear; he conceived of grooved springs for cars; he developed a new photoengraving process and a stereoscopic projection system; he developed a vibrationless diesel engine and a multiple-speed planetary gear arrangement for automotive engines. He also designed a vertical takeoff and landing airplane, and he considered starting an air service between New York and Palm Beach, using World War I surplus Martin bombers. Following World War II, he learned that his engineering company, on a subcontract, had machined a part for the atomic bomb. He invented a kiss-proof lipstick for his mother's business; the lipstick could not be removed before several days had passed; but this hardly counts as an engineering feat. During World War I, he completed flight training as a member of the 57th Squadron in the aviation section of the United States Signal Corps; the war ended before he was sent overseas.

It is far easier to account for his career as a

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Hollywood restaurateur than it is for his engineering accomplishments. With his upbringing in the major eating spots of Europe, his enfilading interest in food was assured. Soon after his income exceeded several thousand dollars weekly, Sturges started The Players, a well-stocked restaurant that one year grossed seven hundred thousand dollars and still lost money. As a boy, he was introduced to fancy food; eating truffles boiled in champagne and Konigsberger klops, hamburgers stuffed with herring, at Ciro's in Paris—natural first steps for running his own fine restaurant. Sturges's adventures in fine eating in France approach those of A. J. Liebling, whose lust for fine food was exceeded only by his skill at writing gracefully about it. Gluttony eventually did Liebling in, a fate Sturges avoided. Between meals, Liebling wrote; between meals, Sturges made movies.

Although some reviewers have refined the practice of reviewing many books simultaneously—it is not uncommon to find fourteen or sixteen books discussed by a single critic in the *New York Review of Books*—it is a new adventure for me. In addition to the biographies and the autobiography, I looked at some of Sturges's movies on my VCR and I read a few books about Hollywood. This was a complex undertaking, the end of which confirmed Sturges's observation: "A good reason for writing one's *auto*biography is that it may prevent some jerk from writing one's biography."

Making order out of my reading and viewing was rather like covering the TransSouth 500 at the Darlington International Raceway in South Carolina, an event at which you expect the leading drivers, as racing enthusiasts say, to dodge a couple of bullets. There are always a few leading drivers you expect will contend with one another throughout the race; and you expect an accident or two to distend the predictable leaders. The race began with Philip Spoto in pole position. His book *Madcap: The Life of Preston Sturges* was published by Little, Brown and Company in 1990. Spoto got away fast, his book was easy reading, and his acceleration seemed steady; but after fifty laps or so, smoke started coming out at irregular intervals from his exhaust. He was running on the high-octane fuels of facts; but his engine seemed to be getting clogged with adjectives and adverbs. Before he made his first pit stop, he had raced through Sturges's childhood and his early years as a playwright on Broadway. I credit him with giving a lot of information painlessly, enough to goad my interest in Preston Sturges's life; the data are impressive.

Spoto's pit stop afforded a brief retrospective on what he had written and made me curious to learn a little about Spoto himself. "It is easy to understand why a restless, eager woman of thirty would head for Paris." "Preston continued to thrive on the fresh experiences life offered him, and his time in Fleurines (which extended for periods in 1908 and 1909) provided happy memories." "With Estelle as with his earlier girlfriends and acquaintances, he relished a good time, the comforts of home, social excitement and all the pleasures accompanying carefree youth. But the deeper requirements of adult bonding were beyond him." Happy memories, adult bonding, my foot; I began talking back to Spoto as I read his book. He needed to fill up on Strunk and White or Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch if he were to do well in the race. I wanted to send him a message from Quiller-Couch: "You can carve your words upon trees or stones (a laborious process) or you can commit them to memory and carry them about in your head; which is cheaper and handier."

About Spoto, I learned from his book jacket that he had also written biographies of Lotte Lenya, Alfred Hitchcock, and Tennessee Williams and that he had "earned a Ph.D. degree from Fordham University and lives in Los Angeles," an unbeatable combination. It didn't get much better when he hit the track again; my reading got in oil dry (as we got through the years to Sturges's successful period in Hollywood, Spoto acknowledged, "By February 1941, war was raging in Europe and there was widespread anxiety in America about global conflagration") and spun out and barely missed a retaining wall.

Analysis of Sturges's movies or what might have influenced his perceptions of comedy is thin; instead, there are occasionally third-party attributions that liken, in one fashion or another, Sturges to Racine, Voltaire, and others; the comparisons are ludicrous—or madcap. The evidence of Sturges's genius at screwball comedy is not revealed; what is delineated is the evidence of why some persons who knew Sturges simply thought of him as mad. Sturges had a shrewd intelligence—you can tell that by seeing a few of his mov-

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ies—and the recounting of his wars against the moguls, including Howard Hughes, his women and his first three wives, and wavering bottom lines is a quick-read kind of fun. Spoto's effort is a good bit better than the people-scooper journalism in *People Magazine* and the *Hollywood Reporter*; but there's little understanding of, and appreciation for, Sturges's skill at shampooing what he considered hypocritical conventions and his sharp, comic assaults on religion, patriotism, sex, the military, marriage, and the movies themselves.

One man's system is another man's component. What Spoto does well is discuss the components of Sturges's movies, especially the ingredients of a stock company of wonderful actors and actresses. Franklin Pangborn, William Demarest, Eric Blore, Esther Howard, Margaret Hamilton, Georgia Caine, Frank Moran, Edward Everett Horton, Eugene Pallette, Chester Conklin, Vic Potel, Eddie Bracken, Rudy Vallee, Brian Donlevy, Jimmy Conlin, Elizabeth Patterson, Harry Rosenthal, Torbin Meyer, and many others enhanced the enjoyment of his movies. The Sturges Stock Company is worth the price of admission.

Far behind at the beginning but coming up fast was the second book I read, *Between Flops: A Biography of Preston Sturges*, by James Curtis, published by Limelight Editions in 1984. His book jacket does not tell where he lived when in the heat of composition; but I assume that it was Los Angeles. After running neck and neck with *Madcap* for a few laps, the books hit each other on the straightaway and a yellow caution flag appeared. The miserable sentences of Mr. Curtis became entangled with the marauding spokes of Mr. Spoto. Good grief, I thought, this cannot be. But it is; Mr. Curtis is running on empty. "Although a virginal Broadway figure, Sturges, fueled by Brander Matthews's axioms, soon became unsufferable." "Preston eventually took up with a shapely young parking attendant whom he chose to make his secretary." "An ambitious Sturges set to work." "Sturges paced the floor, his mind white with rage." There must be some redeeming features of Curtis's book; I did not find out what they are. His book crashed, fortunately out of commission.

At this point, I made a pit stop to discover Brander Matthews's influence on Sturges and to consider the wisdom of Sturges's desire to write his autobiography, the rough notes of which provided the à la carte research for these two books and which was published after them. And I considered how any writer's reputation could survive such disastrously written biographies. Suppose that Curtis, and not Richard Ellmann, had written a biography of James Joyce: how would it come out; how could we bear to accept the genius of Joyce? Ellmann wrote, "Joyce took an immediate interest in the young doctor, and after some talk offered to see her to the funicular." The same sentence, written by Curtis (or the biographer of Nancy Reagan) would be: "A young woman doctor, one of the first women in Europe to be trained for this profession, and James Joyce who, because of three pornographic novels, was a celebrity in local social circles, found that their mutual libidinous impulses corresponded immediately. So he accompanied her to the railway station where three of our reporters just happened to witness the exciting combination of these reciprocating chemistries."

Preston Sturges was an autodidact supremo. To gain some insights on this, I switched to *Preston Sturges by Preston Sturges: His Life in His Words*, adapted and edited by his fourth wife, Sandy Sturges, published by Simon and Schuster in 1990. How did Sturges become a successful playwright without benefit of a higher education or a course in play writing in a graduate school of filmmaking? The same way Abraham Lincoln became a lawyer: he read a book about how to write a play, and he served a brief apprenticeship in the theater. Recuperating from peritonitis in a Chicago hospital (a six-week stay in 1928), he decided he wanted to write a musical comedy based on a book he was given, *Speaking of Operations* by Irvin S. Cobb. Sturges asked his father, Solomon Sturges, to give him some books about play writing, one of which was Brander Matthews's *A Study of the Drama*. He read it and wrote the synopsis of a play; he sent it to Cobb, who liked it. It was not produced and Sturges realized when he returned to New York that his synopsis was "heavy with the distinct odor of herring." He next wrote a play, *The Guinea Pig*, which was produced by the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown, Rhode Island. It ran only a week; but with this play as experience, he got a job as a second assistant stage manager in a play produced by the noted Brock Pemberton.

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Sturges's next play was written in six days at his father's dining-room table in Chicago. *Strictly Dishonorable,* produced by Pemberton, opened on Broadway and ran for 557 performances and earned him $300,000, when money was money. Then he began writing movie scripts in New York.

Sturges wanted to write an operetta. He knew nothing about composition or music. So how did an autodidactic approach give him the skills he needed? Easy. Sturges notes that he read an advertisement from Piano Bill in the back pages of *Popular Mechanics.* Piano Bill claimed that his method would teach anyone how to play the piano. Sturges bought the course for one dollar and learned about passing chords, rolling bass, waltz bass, and ragtime bass—all in the key of G. Sturges hired a graduate of the Damrosch School of Music to transpose the songs into other keys and to orchestrate Sturges's compositions. Then he bought a secondhand upright piano for eighteen dollars and founded the Sturges Music Publishing Company to publish the songs he was writing at the rate of several a day. Sturges wrote the lyrics and music for about sixty songs, including a few that were used in four of his movies. His songs include "Home to the Arms of Mother" (used in his movie *Hail the Conquering Hero*), "The Ginsbergs are Coming," "Wedding of the Painted Moll," and "Where the Deuce Were You This Evening, Bruce?" (Sturges's powerful lubricant was the one-liner; it got him around the track even when the tie-rods were broken; his play on words was his energy as comedy and pratfalls were his horsepower. "Posterity is just around the corner," is a typical Sturgesism.)

Sturges seems to have used everything he ever experienced in his plays and movies; his word-perfect recall system was always at the ready to provide the opening, the line, the entrance or exit that he needed. The first two lines in *Strictly Dishonorable* (She: "What are your intentions?" He: "Strictly dishonorable.") came from a seduction in which a *she* in Paris asked just that and Sturges answered just that. Perhaps it's better to account for his ability to pick up new aptitudes and skills by using that perishable term *lifelong learning* than to rely on the word *autodidact.* But where his engineering skill came from, I have no idea; Sturges provides no clue, no reading of "Fundamentals of Engineering," no relationship to Leonardo da Vinci. He just did it.

Depending on how I feel at the end of this TransSouth contest, I may return to a discussion of learning how to write a script from a guidebook. I may not. On with the race: Spoto, still slightly in the lead, reports that Brooks Atkinson, in his *New York Times* review of *Strictly Dishonorable,* said that it was a "gay, buoyant comedy. For no one could write such deft, amusing lines and describe characters with so much understanding who did not have genuine talent for the theatre." Notwithstanding Atkinson's encomium and the fact that Sturges's next play, *Recapture,* was also written at his stepfather's dining-room table, the play bombed. Spoto reveals that the ending was not appropriate for a comedy: it ends with the leading character being killed in a crashing elevator.

The research that Spoto did—interviews with ex-wives, friends, Sandy Sturges, Sturges's two sons, and actors such as Cesar Romero and Katharine Hepburn—is impressive and possibly all-inclusive. Major events, tidbits of gossip and facts, letters, and reviews are assembled. To be fair, Spoto's is a fine book compared to Curtis's. But it is funny and too much at the same time. So much of the detail he presents of Sturges's life is so preposterous (Sturges's biological father, as Sturges referred to him, sent him a letter following the death of Sturges's mother requesting, "If you saved her false teeth, send them to me as a loving remembrance of my former dear wife") that the biography in its entirety reads as a disjointed, screwball compendium of outlandish facts. Moviemaking becomes a sideline, almost a framework of irrelevance; what is lacking is a sharp understanding of his movies and how Sturges made them. Be that as it may, I could not appreciate Spoto's book so much were it not for the impoverishment of Curtis's book and the inelegant obliqueness of Sturges's autobiography.

In his posthumous competition with his two biographers, Sturges reveals a style and an outlook that they adopted. Sturges has intermittent lapses into sensitivity and astuteness about his life and his career; there is no doubt that Sturges was an intelligent person; but his book reads not much better than a bad script. Inevitably, and sadly, he tells us more than we need to know. In writing about skippering his boat to a thirty-sixth-place finish in a race from California to Honolulu, Sturges says, "She handled magnificently until we ran into

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the doldrums and spent days looking for the wind. With all that gentle rocking though, I was never again so regular in my life."

Sturges beat the system in Hollywood for a while; but then he lost, as many persons do. He set a precedent by becoming the first writer of talking pictures who also served as the director of them; and he gained a percentage of their box-office income. The legacy of his movies is proof of his talent. Sturges lacked what another writer who spent a few years in Hollywood called *fingerspitzengefuhl* or "supreme sensitivity." Joseph Wechsberg's autobiography *The First Time Around* proves that it is possible to live in Los Angeles and write gracefully. Wechsberg, a native of Czechoslovakia, did not learn English until he was thirty-two.

Sturges, who was called Sturgeon by Samuel Goldwyn, seldom reveals deep feelings; his devotion to his fourth wife, Sandy, is an exception. His suffering from terminal success does not appear to have infringed upon this relationship. A few sharp insights, however, intimate that he sometimes had an accurate fix on his adventures in Hollywood. "The only amazing thing about my career in Hollywood is that I ever had one at all," he wrote. For corroboration, see his movies. Many video shops have *Hail the Conquering Hero, Christmas in July, The Miracle of Morgan's Creek, Sullivan's Travels, The Lady Eve,* and *The Great McGinty.*

The last book in the race comes up fast and easily takes the lead. It is a book about his movies: *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood, from Lubitsch to Sturges* by James Harvey, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1987. Harvey is a writer who lives in Brooklyn; he teaches English at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and has written two plays, *Nags Head* and *Dissenters.* His book is an excellent guide to the movies; and it brings more life to Sturges in 155 pages than the other three books do in 991 pages. Harvey titles his section "Sturges: Genius at Work"; he does not compare Sturges to Swift, nor does he compare any of his movies to *King Lear,* which other critics do. No, sir. Harvey tells us what we need to know to appreciate Sturges's movies. His book and the movies themselves make the finish of the TransSouth worthwhile. We might even consider Sturges a genius and not a strange buffoon.

Fun, as I said, was Sturges's game; in a mixture of definitions, ranging from Middle English to the present day, Sturges created enjoyment, amusement, pleasure. The surface enjoyment of his better movies, a string of seven or eight comedies, invokes goodhearted adjectives. Hollywood is a land of make believe, a constant Disneyworld of images and fables whose currency is celluloid. Sturges compels us to believe what he has made; as a substitute for our rather pedantic emotions, in his presence we suspend our workaday judgments and accept an array of responses that compete for belief or disbelief. How does Sturges do it? Below the surface of slapstick and manic farce, there are layers of inventiveness and complexity. He manages to maneuver around or through implausible situations replete with absurdities, mawkishness, and schmaltz, all leavened by corny background music. Sometimes the humor is off-the-wall; sometimes it comes from the gut; much of it comes from incongruities, from outrageous slapstick. He always keeps us off balance.

His creative discord, I suspect, has a template of nihilism that revels in taking apart conventions. He berates with comic inflections standard American shibboleths; in a way, his movies are parables as much as they are fantasies. The good guys survive; the bad guys don't. Sturges's sense of timing, of pacing, is invariably on the mark. As in winter Olympic events, success is measured in hundredths of a second. He never misses.

In his movies, Sturges places his actors in situations in which they are up to their elbows in alligators; and they talk their way out of them. His actors, so it seems, are empowered to make decisions as they go along, from one contretemps to the next. They play their roles like members of a jazz combo, inventing and re-inventing their entrances and exits. There is an illusion of improvisation. Sturges, the field marshal of all that he created, reminds me of the movie in which Alexander Calder directs a production of his magical "Circus"—complete with whistles and drums.

With the race ended, I said that I might return to a guidebook on scriptwriting; and I do. An agent in Hollywood found a story I had written and said that several studios were interested in adapting it for a movie. The agent thought that I ought to write a script, and he sent me a book on how to do it, *Scriptwriting: A Practical Manual.* Fired

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with enthusiasm, I skipped through the authors' five warning admonitions: "1. Beware of idiot plots. 2. Beware of static situations. 3. Beware of diffuse opposition. 4. Beware of too many characters. 5. Beware of theme and symbolism. Here we go!" No help to me here. The authors advised me to concentrate on the "topic element." Okay. The authors explained: "It's the answer you get when you ask, 'What's this film to be about?' Back comes the answer: 'Ulcers.' 'Wire rope.' 'Executive aircraft.' 'Cockroaches.' And there's your topic." All of which perturbed me as I watched the TransSouth; but it offered no illumination on scriptwriting. I returned to a gourmet observation of Sturges's: "A man in possession of many bolts of woolen cloth, quantities of lining and interlining, buttons, thread, needles and padding is not, of necessity, a tailor. A man in possession of many characters, many situations, many startling and dramatic events, and many gags is not, of necessity, a storyteller." Nor, I concluded, a biographer.

A movie might be made of the life of Preston Sturges, say, by Ismail Merchant and James Ivory; it wouldn't, of necessity, be a romantic comedy.

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A Gentleman of the Old School

Homi Bhabha and the Development of Science in India

GEORGE GREENSTEIN

Homi Bhabha was not in the habit of traveling alone. When he drove out to the Bombay airport one day on one of his many trips overseas, he took along a retinue: aides, associates, secretaries. The day was Sunday, but a few last-minute instructions might have occurred to him before boarding the plane.

Trained as a physicist, Bhabha was an administrator of astonishing ability, capable of pushing to completion the most gigantic, visionary of projects. He was founder and director of one of India's most admired research institutes, creator of its atomic energy program, secretary to the government of India, chairman of numerous international agencies. It can be argued that much of modern science and technology in India owes its origin to this one man. His research work, on the other hand, was deeply abstract. His knowledge of mathematics was extensive, even compared to that of other physicists. In style his work was formal, refined, elegant—almost Mozartean in tone. I know of no other instance in which two such radically differing skills—that of a high-level administrator and a superior scientist—were combined in the same person.

A man who dined with Bhabha overseas on one occasion has reported that Bhabha had brought along an aide whose sole function appeared to be to pay the bills. It would not have been seemly for a gentleman to be seen dipping his hand into his pocket, and, above all else, Bhabha was a gentleman. Born to a wealthy Parsi family in 1909, he was aristocratic, international in outlook, and a man of exquisite refinement and taste. In every major capital of the world, he had his favorite hotel. He knew who was singing at La Scala. He knew what was showing at the Tate.

Homi Bhabha's education was select and Western in style. His father was a barrister, one grandfather a government official and a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire, another a well-known philanthropist. His family was related by marriage to the multi-millionaire Tata family of industrialists. In the Tata household across the street, Bhabha would hear as a boy discussions of giant, long-term projects relating to the industrial development of India. Back home in his father's paneled study was a remarkable collection of books and Western classical music recordings. To these records Bhabha and his friends would listen in hushed, reverent silence. A photograph of Bhabha in these days shows an adolescent dressed in a dark suit and tie, reclining in a formal pose in an overstuffed armchair. In his lap is a book on El Greco.

It was inevitable that such a youth would be sent to England for his advanced studies. Bhabha went to Cambridge University (the college he attended there had not long before received a major endowment from an uncle). Although his father wanted him to go into mechanical engineering, Homi wanted to do mathematics. A compromise was reached in which the elder Bhabha agreed to finance Homi's mathematical studies if he started by getting a solid grounding in engineering. Homi got his First in engineering in 1930 and then went on to get a second First in mathematics one year later.

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Through college he cut a wide swath. A fellow student who went on to a highly distinguished career at Cambridge has frankly confessed to me that he had felt positively overawed by his friend Homi in those days. Bhabha collected prize after prize for his mathematical abilities. An accomplished artist (his paintings and drawings have since been published), he designed the stage sets for a Calderon play and for a Mozart opera. He studied harmony and counterpoint, and he wrote a symphony in the classical style. He showed up at a department party dressed as a Spanish grandee. He wrote a skit:

Shakespeare Orders Lunch

SHAKESPEARE: What ho, without!

SERVANT: My lord.

SHAKESPEARE: Full twice or thrice
Have I, with lusty and barbated speech
Sought to affront the portals of thine ears.

SERVANT: Pardon, sweet lord.

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis granted. Look you now,
The time approaches when my corporal frame
For lack of food grows incorroborate;
Fetch me my specs, that I may make perusal
Of whatso'er of viandry is set
For our engorgement . . .

After getting his Ph.D., Bhabha remained at Cambridge in a research position. He worked on cosmic rays. High-speed subatomic particles impinging upon the Earth from space, cosmic rays were the most energetic objects known in those days—and still are, their energies greatly exceeding even those produced in the largest particle accelerators. Their origin is poorly understood, although there is of course no lack of suggestions. But even in the 1930s it was clear that they must have been under way for thousands, possibly millions, of years before encountering the Earth.

Remarkably, cosmic rays appeared to arrive, not singly as individual particles, but in sudden and exceedingly brief showers in which great numbers were detected at once, almost as if they had been produced and had traveled through space in groups. But this could not be, for the showers were known to consist of particles of differing velocity. In transit the more rapid particles would have outstripped the slower, elongating the hypothetical group and failing to produce the observed burst-like shower.

Things became clearer when a series of experiments actually succeeded in documenting the process. In perhaps the prettiest of the experiments, a horizontal metallic sheet was inserted into a cloud chamber, the chamber recording the passage of each ray as a track. A photograph would reveal an individual track impinging upon the sheet from above—but large numbers of tracks fanning outwards beneath in an inverted cone. Within the sheet each particle was multiplying into a spray. Presumably the same process was going on in the upper atmosphere, the individual cosmic rays spawning groups that arrived at the ground as showers.

It was as if a flying golf ball, upon striking the ground, spontaneously transformed into a collection of golf balls. Bhabha took the point of view that the cloud chamber photographs were providing explicit documentation of Einstein's famous relation between mass and energy, $E=MC^2$. The energy of motion of the impinging particle was turning into mass in the form of more particles. A proper treatment required a union of Einstein's theory with quantum mechanics, the theory of subatomic processes, that had recently been achieved by the Cambridge physicist P. A. M. Dirac. Bhabha and a colleague worked out a complete theory of the production of cosmic ray showers according to Dirac's theory.

The picture they evolved was that of a rapid and escalating back-and-forth interchange between matter and energy. The process began when a single cosmic ray collided high above the surface of the Earth with a molecule in the atmosphere. In the collision a photon would be produced—pure energy: a minute burst of light. The photon, now accompanying the deflected cosmic ray, soon itself interacted, transforming into a pair of particles. The single incident cosmic ray particle had become three. Each of these subsequently collided with another air molecule, producing its own photon, and the process continued in a snowballing cascade—thus, the shower.

Dirac's theory is aesthetically exquisite, but it is couched in a complex mathematical language, and the calculations it necessitates are

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daunting. Since the 1930s, various shortcuts have been discovered, smart tricks obviating the need for some of the more laborious slogging. But these were not available in those days. People used to lay out oversized sheets of wrapping paper on tables and fill them with their calculations.

The urbane, charming Bhabha could not have chosen a more unlike mentor than Dirac with whom to work. By all accounts Dirac was an austere, otherworldly individual. He was an uncommunicative soul and hardly ever told anybody what he was working on. His theory involved the mathematical symbol <1 1>, called a "braket," of which the two halves <1 and 1> also held significance. Dirac called them "bra" and "ket," respectively, and was apparently genuinely astonished to learn that the first of these terms also carried another meaning. (He was married at the time.) The story is told that a colleague once tried to give him a book with which to while away the hours on a long train journey, but Dirac refused the gift, explaining that reading "interfered with thought."

The cascade theory of cosmic ray showers was almost too successful. It accounted beautifully for their observed properties but failed to account for the fact that not all cosmic rays produced them. In reality, however, it was known that a second component of cosmic rays existed that could penetrate great distances, even through solid lead, without multiplying into a shower—entirely impossible according to Bhabha's calculations. For a time the possibility was even bruited about that Dirac's theory failed in some essential respect.

Bhabha took an alternative point of view and proposed instead that high in the atmosphere an elementary particle unknown to physics was being produced in cosmic ray collisions. He showed that, if this new particle possessed a particular mass, roughly midway between that of the electron and the proton, it would fail to produce a cascade. Subsequent efforts succeeded in confirming his guess by directly observing the hypothetical particle: it was named the muon.

It remained mysterious, however, how these muons could have been discovered in the first place. Muons were known to be unstable: laboratory experiments showed them to decay quite rapidly. So rapid was this decay that they would not travel far from their point of creation in the upper atmosphere before disintegrating. In particular, they could not possibly reach the ground. But they were reaching the ground: obstinately, muons persisted in showing up in ground-level detectors.

In response to this conundrum, Bhabha thought of the cosmic ray muon in a new and unusual way—not as a previously undiscovered elementary particle, but as a tiny, rapidly moving clock. Each tick of such a clock carried it closer to the moment of its decay. But, according to Einstein's theory of relativity, clocks in motion ticked more slowly than those at rest.

It had been an astonishing proposal when Einstein made it just after the turn of the century, and it remains so today. Einstein's argument—one of deep beauty, profound in its implications and breathtaking in scope—is perhaps the most perfect instance I have ever seen of the power of abstract reasoning. But no familiarity, no study has ever succeeded in accustoming me to such an apparently bizarre notion.

The slowing down of time is not great for clocks traveling at the relatively slight velocity of an automobile, or even of a spacecraft. But, according to Einstein, objects traveling at velocities close to that of light would exist in a kind of suspended animation: lugubriously ticking, each second requiring hours, each hour months . . . a curious combination of blazing speed and eerie stillness. Bhabha recognized that cosmic ray muons constituted just such high-speed "clocks" and that, if relativity was correct, their rate of ticking would be slowed in such a manner. In this way he accounted for their anomalous survival during their passage through the atmosphere down to the ground.

It was, indeed, a double triumph, for when Einstein formulated his elegant theory there had not been the slightest possibility of testing it experimentally. To do so would have necessitated accelerating some clock to impractical velocities. For decades, then, the notion of the slowing down of time remained in a kind of limbo; widely accepted, yet unproven. Bhabha's insight provided the first experimental test of Einstein's prediction.

In 1939 Bhabha returned to India on vacation. While he was there the Second World

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War broke out. After thirteen years at one of the world's centers of research, he suddenly found himself stranded in a relative backwater. He spent the war at an institute in Bangalore. There his work, in the assessment of his colleague and friend M. G. K. Menon, altered in character, becoming more abstract, less concerned with application to observed phenomena, and more taken up with questions of internal coherence and formal elegance. In later life Bhabha commented that this work, though it earned him less recognition, had, in the long run, given him the deepest satisfaction.

During this time a change also occurred in Bhabha himself, one which I find quite amazing. While at Cambridge he had given every indication of intending to remain there forever. Nothing I have learned of him gives the slightest hint of any desire in those days to return home. By the end of his exile during the war he had received a number of job offers from the West. But he rejected them all. For the rest of his life Bhabha never accepted a permanent position abroad.

By the end of the war Bhabha, formerly more British than the British, had become Bhabha the patriot, builder of indigenous science in India. His decision to remain in India went hand in hand with a decision to create a new scientific institution. He did not accept a job at some research center—he built his own. In a letter to one of the Tata family's charitable trusts, he proposed the creation of an institute for fundamental research.

It is difficult for a Westerner to appreciate the context in which this decision took place. India at the time boasted of a number of superior scientists who had been honored by the Nobel Prize or membership in the Royal Society, and the institute at which Bhabha spent the war years was a fine one. But these scarcely added up to a national environment conducive to the practice of science. Indeed, to an enormous degree, Indians regarded their country as inferior in matters pertaining to modern development and, as a matter of course, looked to the West for inspiration. Bhabha was not alone in having gone overseas to college. Endowed professorships at major universities often actually required the holders to have been educated abroad. So, too, with the Indian Civil Service, which insisted that its members be trained in England. Even after the independence of India, the presumption of European superiority remained. The first science adviser to the prime minister of India was British, and to this day Indian scientists prefer to publish in Western, not Indian, journals. In such a context, the decision to create a major research center carried a particularly charged significance.

What can account for Bhabha's change of heart during the war years? In a letter to a relative he wrote of his duty to stay in India, but I find this explanation hard to credit. His actions do not strike me as those of a person acting from a grim sense of duty. Rather they strike me as the vigorous, contented acts of one who has suddenly found a sense of purpose for himself.

Perhaps when he returned home Bhabha found within himself an aptitude for institution building, for administration on a grand scale, that never could have flourished in such a country as England, whose scientific institutions were already well in place, but which was free to flower in the relative vacuum of India. Perhaps, too, he found himself swept up in the exhilaration of a great moment. He had been too young when he left India to have taken part in the independence movement. But by the time he returned it was obvious that independence would not be long in coming. It must have been a heady time, a time in which everything seemed suddenly possible.

V. S. Naipaul, born in Trinidad and of Indian ancestry, has written of his childhood: "I felt [then] that the physical conditions of our life, often poor conditions, only told half the story: that the remnants of the old civilization we possessed gave the in-between colonial generations a second scheme of reverences and ambitions, and that this equipped us for the outside world better than might have seemed likely."

The Tata Trust responded favorably to Bhabha's proposal for the creation of a new research center, and in 1945 the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research was opened. In the early days it was housed in an elegant mansion owned by Bhabha's aunt. She remained in residence, occupying half the house, and she mothered the scientists shamelessly, serving Homi tea in her best china, allowing the staff use of her kitchen and servants, and laying on a grand feast on Parsi New Year's Day. Bhabha's office there was the room in

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which he had been born. Within a few years the Institute outgrew these quarters, and it moved to the former Royal Bombay Yacht Club, a fine old Victorian pile on the waterfront complete with turrets, porches, and gardens. In the days of British rule, no Indian had been allowed inside the building in other than a menial capacity: now the staff was housed in what had been the servants' quarters, and the library occupied what had been a formal ballroom. Funding for the Institute rose at an extraordinary rate, increasing by 30 percent each year during the first ten years. By the mid-1960s it employed twelve hundred people and had moved yet again.

The Institute's money has come from a combination of private and public sources, but one potential donor has been conspicuous only by its absence: the University of Bombay. One might have thought that this university would have jumped at the chance to encourage a strong research presence on its doorstep. But throughout India the development of science and technology has taken place largely outside the university framework.

With rare exceptions, conditions at Indian universities are inimical to the practice of science. During my visit to India in preparation for this article, I visited a major, publicly funded state university and was shocked by the atmosphere of decay I found there. The physical plant can only be described as demoralizing: paint peeling from the walls, corridors filthy, office windows broken, an inner courtyard a mere weed-infested vacant lot. As for the faculty, most made not even the slightest pretense of keeping up with advances in their field, let alone participating in research, and were comfortably coasting downhill towards retirement. Those few who did engage actively in their professions did so in nearly complete isolation and with the most primitive equipment. Technical help was essentially nonexistent: one man with whom I spoke referred to the technicians as bureaucrats whose only function was to insure that work orders be accompanied by the proper paperwork, but who were utterly incapable of carrying out the most rudimentary tasks. The laboratory equipment would have made a Western high school science instructor recoil in horror. I was awed—and shamed—by the drive, the intensity of commitment, that enabled these people to turn out frontline research in the midst of such appalling conditions.

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, in sharp contrast, is internationally recognized as a center of excellence. India's first computer was built there; its first nuclear reactor would never have been constructed without aid from the Institute scientists. People there work in conditions an Indian university professor would find positively sybaritic, and its research program is competitive with that of any Western institution. The Institute occupies a sleek, modern complex of buildings set amid perfectly tended formal gardens. Paintings adorn the walls, sculpture the entrance foyer. From office windows the white towers of the Bombay skyline rise across the bay.

As I walked the corridors there one day, it occurred to me that Bhabha's choice of architectural style for his Institute might be significant. Not only in its research would the Tata Institute fit in well at, say, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but its buildings would look at home there, too. Why had he adopted so resolutely Western a tone and avoided the slightest reference in its construction to any Indian architectural motifs?

On the day I arrived in India, the newspaper carried an article describing an address given before a science congress by Prime Minister Chandrashekhar. In his speech, Mr. Chandrashekhar pressed the delegates to cease pursuing what he termed Western-oriented science and return to a more Indian mode of research. Was he right? Is science an exclusively Western phenomenon? It is difficult to express in words the sense of cultural dislocation, of an absolute and fundamental alienness, that I experienced throughout my stay in India. Much of the time I felt as if I had entered a different universe. But at the Tata Institute, I felt the ease and comfort of one who has returned home. For all his claims to be developing indigenous technological expertise, was Bhabha in reality merely attempting to impose foreign ideals onto an uncongenial environment?

Inside India today there exists a group of people who would agree with the prime minister. My guess is that these people are primarily motivated in their opinions by sentiments of nationalism—by the wish that the

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country would abandon modern technological and scientific development and return to its ancient glories. In America as well, one can point to people who would agree with Chandrashekhar—those who distinguish between the wisdom offered by science and the wisdom offered by Eastern meditative techniques, as well as those who regard science as nothing more than a form of political domination.

None of these people would take any comfort from those with whom I spoke in India. During my stay there, I raised the point of the prime minister's speech with every person I interviewed—a mixture of scientists and foundation executives. Without exception, each of them rejected his distinction utterly. There was no such thing as Western science or Eastern science, they argued—only science. "I never regarded myself as learning the methods of the West when I was a student," one scientist told me. "I was simply learning my trade."

The prime minister's speech may have amounted to nothing more than a concession to popular sentiment. But my guess is that his point may indeed have a certain validity, if not with regard to the nature of science then with regard to the role that science and scientists play in Indian society. The tourist who remains in its cities will return home with an utterly distorted image of this country. Three out of four Indians live not in these modern, industrialized centers but in tiny farming villages. In these villages, few homes possess either running water or electricity. The predominant means of transportation is the bullock cart, and farming techniques have altered but little in centuries. The gap between the inhabitants of such a village and an Indian scientist is overwhelmingly greater than that between this scientist and his Western counterparts. To these people, the activities of a scientist must appear as incomprehensible as those of a Martian.

Bhabha argued for the funding of fundamental research in India by invoking the "trickle-down" theory of development: that the discoveries of research ultimately would emerge as benefits to the society as a whole. This happens in the West all the time—today's great scientific discovery becomes tomorrow's gadget, obtainable for a pittance at Kmart. While these benefits also accrue to India's middle- and upper-class population, economically dominant but small in number, they never touch its villagers.

For these people, the fruits of technological advance are of a wholly different order, and they have nothing to do with advance-guard research. The most impressive example I know of is the Satellite Instruction Television Experiment. Under this so-called SITE program, the government gave each village a television set, and educational programs were beamed nationwide via a geosynchronous satellite. Care was taken that these programs concerned themselves with technology appropriate to village life: crop rotation, water purification, and the like. Programs we might watch on "Nova" were sedulously avoided. The antennas by which these satellite broadcasts were received themselves were a triumph of appropriate technology—a mere few wires suspended from poles stuck in the ground. The SITE experiment reached twenty thousand villages and went on for a year; its place has since been taken by a series of half-hour broadcasts each night. This modest, low-technology enterprise has done more to benefit the bulk of India's population than any amount of "Western-style" science.

In saying this, I am far from arguing that science should not be pursued in a country like India. I am saying that its justification must involve arguments of a different order, and I would argue that the real justification for science is the same in India as in the West: the benefits of learning something of the true scheme of nature and of our place in that scheme. These are enough for me. They are enough for most scientists: I have yet to meet a one who works for the good of humanity.

"Homi was a distant alp. One did not presume to climb it."

In conversation after conversation with those who knew him, I heard in people's voices appreciation and respect for Bhabha, but no friendship. He did not have personal friends at the Tata Institute. Throughout his career, there was always an element of social distance between him and the people with whom he directly worked. I think it is fair to say that, in some fundamental sense, Bhabha did not understand the life of the ordinary Indian. His wealth, his aristocratic upbringing set him apart. In designing the Institute, he took care to get an espresso machine for the

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cafeteria, but he allowed plans for staff housing to languish for years: this in Bombay, where real-estate prices are among the highest in the world. He was not one to hang around the corridors chatting—most people there hardly ever saw him. An air of fastidiousness about him, a formality, effectively forbade casual contact.

At one point Bhabha circulated a memo to the Institute staff dealing with its buildings and grounds. It makes for interesting reading:

> Each member of the staff should have a sense of personal pride in these buildings, which have been given for his use, and it is his duty to take personal interest in their proper maintenance and to see that he himself uses them in such a way as to maintain their quality and cleanliness. . . . A member, who sees another not using the buildings properly, should draw his attention to the proper conduct in such matters. If any person continues to misbehave, the matter should be reported to his superior.

This is not a memo to grown men and women: it is a memo from a father to his children.

The story is told that a group of scientists who had recently arrived in India for a conference found themselves transported about the country by bus while Bhabha himself traveled separately in his private limousine. One of the conferees is said to have been so disgusted that he left the next day. On another occasion, Bhabha escorted a visiting lecturer to the hall where the visitor was to deliver his talk. They found every seat taken. Bhabha gestured to the people sitting in the front row, each one of whom rose and vanished, leaving Bhabha to attend the lecture in solitary splendor in that row. The first of these stories has been disputed, and I cannot vouch for its accuracy. But Bhabha does seem to have been the sort of person about whom such tales accumulate.

With only one exception, every photograph I have ever seen shows Bhabha dressed in a Western suit (the exception is the inauguration of India's first nuclear reactor, for which he wore national dress). His outlook was international; not Indian. My guess is that most of the people he regarded as his equals lived not in India but in the West. Each was an acknowledged expert in his field, and Bhabha was continually traveling abroad to drop in on them. There he would learn of the latest advances and upon returning home would fill everyone in on the news.

By all accounts, Bhabha was an extraordinarily invigorating person to be around. Everything seemed possible in his presence. His ability to secure money was legendary. Roadblocks that would have defeated another were surmounted with ease through his personal connections. Some new and marvelous project was always in the offing. At one point he brought in a biologist to head a new effort in that direction (not bothering to tell anybody until after the position had been offered). Upon arriving, the biologist had a conference with Bhabha in which he was asked how much space the program would require. "Oh, maybe five thousand square feet," the biologist replied. "Nonsense," Bhabha responded. "You'll run out of that much space in no time at all." So he built him a whole new building.

In matters of research, Bhabha might leave his scientists alone, but when it came to the Institute's physical layout he snooped about endlessly. He pestered the firm of architects that designed it over the tiniest of details. He worried about the location of the toilets and would have half-completed walls knocked down if their location did not suit him. When he got word that a rare tree was scheduled to be cut down at a nearby botanical garden, he arranged for the thing to be dug up and transplanted to the Institute grounds.

A great patron of the arts, Bhabha through his wealth amassed a fine collection. Several well-known Indian artists had in fact been discovered by him. Universities collect art and hide it away in museums: Bhabha set his collection out for view in the corridors and offices of the Tata Institute. Upon purchasing a new painting, he would experiment with various locations, hanging it one place and another, asking the advice of friends. He did not merely want the Institute to be a world center of research—he wanted it to be a work of art, and he fussed over it endlessly as the proud father he was. Perhaps in this regard it is significant that he never married.

Bhabha took everything he did seriously. He was an artist of some talent. His interest in architecture was deeply informed, and he would discourse at length on the architectural principles expressed at Versailles, on the façade of a famous mosque, or on the Persian concept of the apotheosis of water that lies at the heart of Moghul garden design. He published an article on Leonardo da Vinci; he played the violin; he raised rare plants. Din-

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ner parties at his penthouse apartment were elegant affairs of good food and fine wines. The guest list was carefully composed; the conversation, invariably scintillating, would range from an interesting new artist he had recently discovered to government plans for the construction of a giant hydroelectric plant, from the theories of Einstein to the ideas of Heidegger.

Both in his research and in his public policy work, Bhabha was fascinated all his life by energy. It is indeed a remarkable concept. At the time of the scientific revolution, energy was very poorly defined. Often confused with force or momentum, the term carried little more than a loose sense of "oomph." Newton's *Principia* pays little attention to it—Newton formulated his theory not in terms of energy but of force. Not until the nineteenth century and the development of thermodynamics did energy come into its own, achieving the status of an incorporeal, unseen, and yet objectively real attribute of the physical world.

The more time has passed, the more the concept has broadened far beyond the intentions of its creators. Nineteenth-century physics recognized three forms: the potential energy of a soaring hawk, the kinetic energy the hawk attains by folding its wings and diving, and the chemical energy of the food it seeks. Twentieth-century physics has added more forms. We now speak of the energy of light; of massless, chargeless neutrinos; and even of empty space. But throughout all its transformations and extensions, the term *energy* has retained the essential connotation of life, of vigor. Blake said it best: "Energy is eternal delight."

In his letter proposing the creation of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bhabha brought up an even newer form: that of the atomic nucleus. "When nuclear energy has been successfully applied for power production in say a couple of decades from now, India will not have to look abroad for its experts but will find them ready at hand," he wrote. It was a prophetic statement, coming before the bombing of Hiroshima and the first public announcement of the existence of atomic power. It is significant that in his proposal Bhabha explicitly linked India's need for pure research with its need for energy.

Throughout Bhabha's career, he regarded the question of energy as central to the problem of national development. "No power is as expensive as no power" was how he liked to put it. In the mid-1950s he instituted a program of development of nuclear power in India. At the 1955 United Nations Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, of which he was president, he gave his reasons.

Bhabha's address before this conference is a remarkable document. It begins by dividing the range of history into three broad epochs, each distinguished by its pattern of energy use. The first, pre-industrial, epoch drew its energy from muscle power. He emphasized that

> a man in the course of heavy physical labor in an eight hour day can hardly turn out more than half a kilowatt-hour of useful work. . . . [T]his is to be compared with the rough figure of twenty kilowatt-hours or more of energy per person which is daily utilized in the industrially advanced countries today. It followed that a high level of physical comfort and culture could only be enjoyed by a small fraction of the population by making use of the collected surplus labor of the rest. It is sometimes forgotten that all the ancient civilizations were carried on the muscle power of slaves or of a particular class.

The second epoch was the industrial, which allowed a greatly increased level of power consumption—but only in certain nations. Bhabha argued that reliance on conventional technology would forever prevent the developing nations from attaining the level of energy use enjoyed in the West. India's per capita energy use amounted to a small fraction—the figure is one-sixtieth today—of our own. Were India to increase its level of consumption to match ours, the country would exhaust its coal reserves within a decade. Bhabha's point was quite general: if the developing nations were to reach the level of energy use enjoyed by the developed ones, the required increase in world power generation could not be provided by ordinary means—hence the need for nuclear power. "The acquisition by man of the knowledge of how to release and use atomic energy must be recognized as the third great epoch in human history."

I found it a sad and ironic experience to read over the proceedings of this conference.

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People were so optimistic that nuclear energy, having devastated two cities, might now become the godsend that would resolve at a stroke humanity's deepest problems. Everything seemed possible in those days: a dramatically increased standard of living for all, the banishment of hunger, a cure for cancer. So august a periodical as *The Old Farmer's Almanac,* ever the barometer of popular opinion, referred to 1951 as Atomic Year Six.

At Trombay, a twelve-hundred-acre plot of land across the harbor from Bombay, Bhabha directed the construction of Asia's first nuclear reactor. It was an extraordinary effort, requiring the development of much technology new to the country—and all the more so in that, with the sole exception of the purchase of fuel elements from the United States, it was built entirely indigenously. While most European nations were purchasing their reactors from the United States, India built its own.

Throughout Bhabha's career, the technological expertise for which he pressed was a purely indigenous one. He used to say that if an item of equipment was imported from abroad, all one got was that particular instrument. But if one built it oneself, an all-important lesson in expertise was learned as well. In the long run, this policy contributed immeasurably to the creation of a technical base in India. But it drastically slowed things down.

The construction of the Trombay reactor, and indeed the entire development of science in India, represents a triumph of extraordinary magnitude. Steps that would have been trivial in the West became time-consuming excursions into research and development. The most humdrum instruments—things one could buy off the shelf at Radio Shack—had to be built from scratch. But this required a network of supporting technology that was absent. A Western scientist who needs a particular piece of, say, laboratory glass will order it from the glassblower and can expect to have it within days. No such service was available to Bhabha's engineers: in the early years of the Tata Institute, he was forced to locate a promising glassblower and ship him all the way to England for training. The difficulty was that this man, lured by the superior facilities available in the West, might very well never have returned. In this instance he did; but a newspaper item during my stay in Bombay mentioned that every single graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology this year had chosen to emigrate.

India is a nation of chaos and of numbing, stifling bureaucracy. An item of foreign equipment imported from abroad, such as the Trombay fuel elements, can be held up for months at airport customs. The scientist who shows up at the airport, seeking to pry his stuff loose, will find himself caught up in a scene of unimaginable confusion. Hordes of people mill about aimlessly: others squat motionlessly in the middle of the room, gazing remotely into the distance and seemingly resigned to spending days there. Long lines queue up before sullen, uncommunicative officials: taking his place in one, the scientist will spend hours as it inches forward, only to learn upon reaching its head that he had chosen the wrong line or that his paperwork is not in order. Paint peels from the walls; illumination gleams weakly down from the occasional naked neon tube.

The engineers who built the reactor at Trombay worked at times around the clock. No late-night transportation was available to take them home, nor was food available at the construction site. Bhabha wished to provide these engineers with a car and food from a nearby restaurant. But both were forbidden by government regulations. He had to go all the way to the prime minister himself on this one.

So simple a matter as getting from here to there can be a daunting undertaking in India. Airplanes and trains are often booked to capacity for weeks in advance. As for travel by road, it is at best an adventure. Busses are jammed with hordes of people oozing out of windows and perched upon the roofs. They share the road with cars, trucks, motor scooters, bicyclists, bullock carts, camel carts, and pedestrians (the sidewalks are impassable). In one spot three men shove along a cart piled high with goods; in another a bullock lies motionlessly in the very middle of the road. A monkey darts across the street; drivers lean upon their horns.

Recently an Indian academic of my acquaintance spent a sabbatical leave in America. A friend took her driving on some errands. At one point the two found themselves whizzing smoothly along on a superhighway. After a period of uneventful silence, the visitor turned and addressed her friend. "Tell me," she asked, "when you drive in the States, what do you *think* about?"

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There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that Bhabha would never have achieved what he achieved had it not been for his aristocratic background and personal connections. Coming as it did from a member of the family, his letter to the Tata Trust proposing a research institute must at the very least have received special attention. In leapfrogging over the bureaucracy, who he knew mattered far more than what he knew. When a group of Bhabha's people building a radio telescope encountered difficulties in acquiring an appropriate site, a personal call to a state minister of industries cleared up the problem. When Bhabha got wind one day of a plan to construct a naval dockyard in his Institute's front yard, he used his personal connections to defeat the project, salvaging the view of the harbor.

Bhabha's most important personal connection was Jawaharlal Nehru. The two had met as young men and personally liked each other. Both were of aristocratic families, had grown up in circumstances far removed from that of the average Indian, and both had spent long periods of time in the West. In later life they made every effort to meet regularly. Bhabha's correspondence with Nehru is courteous, formal, affectionate. He always addressed the prime minister in writing as "Bhai," a term that might be translated "elder brother."

My Dear Bhai,

I returned to India yesterday after a 12-day halt in London for the Tercentenary Celebrations of the Royal Society and a 2-day halt in Paris. I attended two [lectures] and found them most stimulating. It is remarkable how by dint of immense hard work by many outstanding people one has now been able largely to reconstruct the chemical structure of the biological molecules of which living substances are made. . . .

My Dear Bhai,

I returned from Europe on Tuesday the 23rd June after a brief but very full trip.

I enjoyed the two days I spent in Cambridge in connection with the conferment of an honorary degree on me. . . . I stayed in Cambridge at the Master's Lodge in Trinity as the guest of Lord Adrian. This was evidently a particularly good year for roses. I have never seen such a profusion of beautiful roses, as was to be found in his garden at the back adjoining the river. The two days in Cambridge, although very hectic, were most refreshing. . . .

And from Nehru:

My Dear Homi,

So you are back after collecting more honors! I liked your speech at the Cambridge Luncheon. I am glad you are staying at Bangalore to do some quiet work. . . .

In 1959, at an address before an international Planned Parenthood conference, Bhabha proposed a solution to India's population problem. He called for a program of research aimed at developing a substance that, when mixed with rice, would have the effect of reducing fertility by 30 percent.

Bhabha was fully aware that his proposal would arouse opposition, but I think it is fair to say that he had little respect for that opposition. He understood perfectly well that people would suffer feelings of invasion under such a program, yet he regarded those feelings as not particularly important—as no more than an unfortunate stumbling block standing in the way of his program's implementation, rather than a basic flaw in its conception. It never seemed to have crossed his mind that children are the only form of social security that exists in rural India, that sons who will care for them in old age are all that stands between aging villagers and starvation. It is characteristic that Bhabha's approach to the problem of population—of any social problem—took little account of social realities.

Bhabha thought instead in terms of research. He had an unbounded faith in the power of science as an instrument of social change. The problem of national development was for him solely a problem of the development of modern technology. At the time of his death, he was working on a survey of India's electronics industry, ranging from the most inexpensive radio to the most sophisticated silicon chip. He formulated policies to protect its vast deposits of thorium, used in nuclear reactors and medical technology, and he inaugurated the Indian space program.

Control of science in India is highly centralized, and its directors are largely answerable only to themselves. Toward the end of his life, Bhabha accumulated enormous powers. He

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was director of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, director of the nuclear reactor complex at Trombay (renamed the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre after his death), secretary to the government of India in the Department of Atomic Energy, and as such also ex officio chairman of India's Atomic Energy Commission, and chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Cabinet. In the year before his death, the budget under his direct control amounted to 115 million rupees—more than 6 million dollars at the present rate of exchange. On the international scene he was president of the first United Nations Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, chairman of the Union of Pure and Applied Physics, and chairman of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In thinking of this man, the image perpetually rises to my mind of one of those great, larger-than-life figures of the Renaissance: laying out plans for a new city one day, waging war on the next, writing a sonnet on the third. When the International Atomic Energy Agency was created and he was named its director, Bhabha established the headquarters in Vienna at least in part because of that city's cultural life. A visit to London for a meeting of the Royal Society would be combined with a meeting with a government minister; while in Chicago for a conference with the director of a giant hydroelectric plant, he might drop in on a well-known art collector.

Three quotations from Homi Bhabha's writings illustrate his range:

> Art, music, poetry, and everything else that I do have this one purpose—increasing the intensity of my consciousness and life.

> [The Canadian-Indian nuclear reactor] project will have to be handled by the Department of Atomic Energy, not only at the technical level but at the inter-governmental level, and the Agreement will have to be signed on behalf of India as the Secretary of this Department . . . unless this action is taken, all inter-governmental correspondence will have to be routed through the Department of Economic Affairs.

> The permanent things in nature are certain generalized concepts like energy, momentum, angular momentum and electric charge, which are always conserved, while the actual elementary particles themselves are but the transitory embodiments of their metamorphoses.

Bhabha died in 1966 in an airplane crash on a trip to Europe. The news reached India just as Indira Gandhi was being sworn in as prime minister. A postage stamp was issued in his honor. The first day cover shows him brooding mildly over Trombay, his nuclear city; beside him is an artist's palate, and beneath him the Ode to Joy theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

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Sailing

TIMOTHY E. THATCHER

Oh, I am learning, learning
all those things my father
never taught before he died,
old, I thought, at fifty-seven,
leaving a wife and three children
he loved, leaving a wooden,
ocean-rigged ketch just when
the long cruising could begin.
He loved his boat.
It was a live thing,
teak and cedar and fir,
steel and brass and hemp,
an old-fashioned boat,
not easily handled,
for an old-fashioned man.
She's gone now, of course,
somewhere in Portland,
used over the years to her
limits by different owners,
beached in the South Seas,
seams sprung, demasted in
a Caribbean storm,
those long voyages finally made.
She got pushed and pulled,
creaking in stretches my father
only dreamed of, sailing
on his weekends in Puget Sound.
I'm glad her destiny came
in being worn down.
The Windjob, she was known
along our piece of inner
coast, a grand old boat,
designed by Edwin Monk,
twenty-two deadweight tons

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of wood and iron and concrete
ballast, steel halyards,
manila sheets, a staysail
useless but for steerage,
fifty-seven feet from
waterline to mainmast top,
slightly under forty stem to stern.
When my father died,
my brother, a friend and I
took her out for a last
mini-voyage, a longer weekend
than most she'd known.
We lost the engine—an air
bubble in the diesel's injection—
and anchored under sail,
sweeping through the channel
at Port Madison on the tide,
dropping the staysail (kept
raised to give resistance to
the rudder), dropping the hook,
riding the anchor until it caught,
the spray from its line popping in
little drops, and the Windjob stopped
her stately glide less than forty
yards from the muddy beach.
We handled her well.
We'd been well taught.
We were proud sailors.
We were a sailor's proud sons.
That night I cooked pork chops
on the oil stove and instant
mashed potatoes, in an aluminum pot,
that turned to slate gray mush.
We laughed hungrily in dim
cabin light, echoing another voice.
Behind me, my little brother
tore the engine down and blew
the bubbles from the fuel lines.
He was just eighteen, our father
gone less than a year,
I almost twenty-one, dreading
another autumn birthday.

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That winter, her masts bare trees
against the muddy sky, we took
her out again, under power,
with buyers on board.
We didn't like them; they were
loud, pretentious, rich.
I could see the anger
in my brother's eyes, standing wide,
the tiller in his hands,
squinting ahead against the wind,
avoiding these boisterous men
who didn't love—and never would–
the lady under them.
We left negotiations to Mom.
She worked that pain alone,
taking less than what the boat was worth.
My brother and I didn't know,
and couldn't tell her then,
even if we had.
The Windjob, my father's dream,
dreamed as a boy at the edge
of the high plains decades past,
was for us, suddenly, Chekhovian.
I even called her that:
our cherry orchard.
Now, well past forty, lost
dreams of my own scattered
across the land of my life,
I still sniff the air and smell her:
fuel fumes, bilge, beeswaxed twine,
old timbers, caulk, faint mildew
in the lazaret, hemp and canvas.
I can hear the snap of a jib,
the slap of rigging on the masts.
I bark a knuckle and think
of wooden blocks, brass
winches verdigrised by salt.
And I remember my father's grin,

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lightened by a whitening frame of beard,
shadowed by the mizzen,
as we rode a reach, close-hauled,
across a long afternoon.
I wish I could tell him
what I've learned alone,
what he knew but also
knew he couldn't teach,
what I had to find myself.
He was a wise man in his silence,
not aloof, not withdrawn.
I should have watched him
sailing with a closer eye,
but I was a boy and thought
he'd live forever.
Now there's another in my life,
to whom I wish to teach
those lessons that my father
taught and didn't:
how to stand on a tilting deck,
how to feel the wind on the back
of your neck and judge its force,
how to plant your feet
against a heeling rail,
when to come about,
when to run before the wind
and take the current . . .
and all those other unteachable
things each generation
needs to learn themselves.
I have become old-fashioned,
not yet old, not easily handled.
My silence is my father's,
knowing, with a loving sadness:
I can teach a man to sail,
as once my father did,
but I can never teach him why.

✪ TIMOTHY E. THATCHER, who is currently working on a novel, lives in Puyallup, Washington.

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Jacob Tonson, Bookseller

KEITH WALKER

"Before the eighteenth century it was indecorous to make a living out of poetry; afterwards it became almost impossible," Pat Rogers begins a recent review in the *Times Literary Supplement* (April 26, 1991), with some sacrifice of accuracy to elegance. The responsibility for writers being able, for however short a time, to make money out of poetry rests largely with the bookseller Jacob Tonson.

Details about a man's life in the seventeenth century, unless they have survived by some happy accident, are rare and sketchy at best. In this essay I want to flesh out the life and career of Jacob Tonson (1655–1736), the founder of literary publishing in English, and the arranger, possibly the inventor, of the accepted canon of English literature until very recently, and to suggest something of his importance in the history of publishing.

Tonson was not memorialized by the antiquarian and gossip John Aubrey to whom we owe so many vivid details of life in the seventeenth century. He came too late to the Restoration scene to have been mentioned by Pepys in his *Diary*. He was, though, known to the choleric Oxford diarist and historian and Aubrey's friend, Narcissus Luttrell (for whom he compiled newsletters), and through friendship with the leading writers Tonson survives in certain of their letters, poems, and in other documents.

There is one odd circumstance: a portrait of Tonson by Godfrey Kneller is present today in London's National Portrait Gallery. This portrait—a "document" of the first importance—is one of Kneller's finest, striking and arrestingly different from those of the pudding-faced ennobled nonentities he habitually painted. It shows a plump, well-formed, middle-aged man, with jutting jaw (a mark of independence, even pugnaciousness?), wearing informal morning dress. A red turban covers his head. He disdains to wear a wig, almost a necessity for people displaying themselves on semi-official occasions. Tonson's neck cloth is easy, negligently flowing, as is his green robe. He has every right to present himself as proudly independent. In his right hand he holds a finely bound folio of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the poem he published in the full recognition that it was a masterpiece, the poem he propagated, and the poem that, more even than any poem by Dryden, brought him wealth and fame.

The most surprising thing about this portrait is that it was done in the first place. Booksellers were not among the class of people to have their portraits painted in the late seventeenth century by an expensive foreign court painter like Godfrey Kneller. Yet here was Jacob Tonson, son of a shoemaker, painted in a series that he himself commissioned (as one version has it) and which numbered nine dukes (Dorset, Manchester, Montagu, Newcastle, Richmond, Grafton, Devonshire, Kingston, and Somerset), and assorted earls, marquesses, viscounts, and barons. A few knights (Richard Steele, the journalist; Samuel Garth, the physician and poet; John Vanbrugh, the architect and playwright) together with a smattering of men without any title at all (including William Congreve and Joseph Addison) made up the thirty-five or so of Kneller's other subjects.

The paintings are of members of the Kit-Cat Club, of which Tonson was the guiding spirit, host, and secretary—a convivial gathering of

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some thirty-five Whig grandees and men of culture of the day whose name derives from that of Christopher Cat, a landlord who apparently made delicious mutton pies.

The publication and popularization of Milton's works were to be the making of Tonson's reputation and fortune as a bookseller (the word then connoted approximately what we understand today by the modern word "publisher," and our sense of the modern word is, in great part, determined by Tonson's practice).

Tonson was born into the world of bookselling. He came from a puritan background. His grandfather Matthew Walbanke, successful publisher of strong parliamentary sympathies, produced a paper supporting the parliamentary side during the civil war—and we may suppose the Tonsons to have been of the same inclinations, especially in view of Jacob's fervent Whiggish activities later in life. (These details come from Kathleen M. Lynch's *Jacob Tonson, Kit-Cat Publisher,* 1971. I am also indebted to Harry M. Geduld's *Prince of Publishers: A Study of the Work and Career of Jacob Tonson,* 1969.)

Tonson had a good education. Kathleen Lynch conjectures that he might have been a pupil at Charterhouse where he would have learned Latin. Certainly Latin was a subject he knew well later in life, when he published an edition of the complete works of many of the classical Roman poets in conjunction with Cambridge University Press. M. H. Black says in his history of Cambridge University Press: "Jacob Tonson . . . saw a market for elegant and correct editions of the major classics which ought to be in every gentleman's library . . . and which could be reprinted in a smaller format and in larger numbers for student use."

Tonson was apprenticed to Thomas Basset, a well-known publisher, in 1670, at the age of fourteen. Basset released him in 1678. It was a good time to begin in the trade. Government control of the press had necessarily been weakened by the turmoil of the late cataclysm of the civil war. The restored Stuarts passed a Printing Act, sometimes called the Licensing Act, in 1662 that limited to twenty the number of master printers, and to four the number of master type founders (presumably these were all known and easy to check up on), permitted printing only in London, Oxford, Cambridge, and York, and created a surveyor of the press. Censorship was enthusiastically enforced by Sir Roger L'Estrange.

But after the civil war, with its relative freedom of expression, nothing could be the same as it had been, however much the Church of England (the principal beneficiary of the Restoration settlement) wished it to be so. And a court where the "blaspheming," "atheistical," philosopher Thomas Hobbes was honored, and protected by the king, wasn't likely to enforce orthodoxy in thinking too rigorously.

The publishing world had been severely shaken some five years before Tonson was apprenticed, first by the plague (1665), which raged fiercest in the tightly packed streets of the City of London, where most booksellers had their shops and where Tonson lived, and a year later by the Great Fire of London of 1666, which destroyed many publishers' shops, including their highly expensive stocks of paper. Thousands of books were stored for safety in the crypt of St. Paul's and in adjoining buildings. All these were destroyed. Entire editions perished.

Money in publishing then, as now, was in the production of law, medical, and (perhaps not like today) theological books, which formed the great mass of what was published at that time: the production of works of literature was relatively unprofitable. "Literary" publishing bulks large in our consciousness, for works of literature are almost the only books of this period that we still care about, but their relative insignificance at the time in publishing terms should not be forgotten. Tonson was undoubtedly interested in works of literature, but since he began with little capital, we must suppose Tonson was forced to enter this other side of the publishing market. But he continued to produce works of literature and history almost exclusively after he was a rich and successful merchant. At first, he specialized in printing play scripts, which were ephemeral octavos, and relatively easy to print.

It was Tonson's long and close association with Dryden that began and determined his role. They must have first come into contact about 1678, when Dryden had been poet laureate for more than ten years, and, since the death of Milton, in neglect and obscurity (1674), was indisputably the leading poet in England. At all events, in 1679, Tonson, then a young man of twenty-four, with very little

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capital, won the writer Dryden from his previous publisher, Henry Herringman. It would be interesting to know the reason for Dryden's split from Herringman. In a satire on Dryden, "The Medal of John Bayes," Thomas Shadwell said that Dryden was "a Journeyman [hireling, drudge] t'a Bookseller." A note specifies that the bookseller "kept [lodged] him in his House for that purpose." Dryden had been on friendly terms with Herringman, at one time, as we have seen, staying in his house. But there is no evidence that Herringman ever pushed his books very hard, and we may suppose Dryden to have been resentful of this, judging by the apparent readiness with which he threw his lot in with Tonson, this new, inexperienced bookseller with little capital of his own.

Certainly the new arrangement is a testimony to Tonson's business acumen and forceful personality. The association was to last until Dryden's death in 1700 and beyond. Through Dryden, Tonson would meet and become friends with most of the leading writers of the day. One of Tonson's most amiable traits is that he seems to have been tenacious of his friendships, never falling out seriously with anybody (with the exception of the secretive and furtive Joseph Addison), but yet always telling his friends what he thought of them. The bookseller John Dunton wrote: "To do Mr. Tonson justice, he speaks his mind upon all occasions, and will flatter nobody."

Tonson's association with Dryden came through Tonson's friendship with William Davenant, son of Sir William Davenant, poet and playwright and manager of the Duke's House, one of the two playhouses in London. Tonson published Dryden's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. In the seventeenth century poets did not expect to be paid for their works, and it was felt that to publish at all (by way of print) might not perhaps be quite the proper thing to do. Many poets did not even have their work published in printed form, preferring to have it circulated as a written book of leaves containing pages copied out by a scribe and produced by a scriptorium. Scriptoria thrived in the period of the Restoration. They have not been much studied because until recently it has been assumed (wrongly, it seems) that, given the choice, a reader would prefer to have the text of the poems he read in printed rather than handwritten form. Handwritten publications evaded censorship more easily, and there may have been an element of snobbery in possessing a unique copy of anything, which would add to the attraction.

The popularizing activities of Tonson did much to remove what J. W. Saunders has called (in *Essays in Criticism*, 1951) "the stigma of print." Early in the century poets mostly wrote for rich and aristocratic patrons who would reward them appropriately for their work. By their collaboration, the forty-eight-year-old Dryden and the twenty-four-year-old Tonson established a new model for the poet to reach out directly to his readers, and to be supported by them. Not much money could be made by writing for the playhouse after 1679. (The two companies were originally set up in 1660, and between them, they held a monopoly; in 1682, they had to join forces.) In 1680 Tonson and Dryden edited a work for which Dryden wrote a preface, notable for its disquisition on the principles of translation and division of verse translation under three heads: "metaphrase" (line-by-line rendering); "paraphrase" (loosely close rendering); and "imitation" (conveying a general notion). The preface for a collection of verse translations "by several hands" of Ovid's *Heroides* (laments of mythical women to their absent lovers) was entitled *Ovid's Epistles*. This proved to be an enormously popular work, being reprinted in 1681, 1683, 1688, 1701 (the "sixth edition"—the existence of a fifth isn't recorded), 1705, 1712, 1716, 1720, 1725, 1727, 1729, and 1748, and, perhaps more important, served as a model by which the partnership (we must call it that) was to work for the next twenty-one years. Dryden made suggestions for work to be published, solicited contributors, wrote prefaces, translated—in short, "edited," in our modern sense. It is hard to find earlier examples of anything like this happening.

In 1684 the two men initiated the first of what were to be annual miscellanies of short poems by various authors. For David Wykes, author of *A Preface to Dryden* (1977), the "importance of these volumes is manifold":

> They provided a place of publication for short poems which might otherwise have circulated only in manuscript and have been lost in time; they permitted new, young poets to get into print early in their careers and in the company of their elders; they allowed a poet to provide an authoritative text

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of a poem earlier printed in corrupt form . . . and, most important of all, they tested further the public taste for translations.

A second and allied feature of the partnership between Dryden and Tonson was the exploitation of the possibilities of publication by subscription, a practice that had been earlier used by publishers of expensive law books and works of learning but seldom applied to works of literature. (John Ogilby's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1654) seems to have been the first.) Dryden's translation of *The Works of Virgil* was published in this way in 1697, the publication being something of a national event, besides profiting for Dryden some fourteen hundred pounds and demonstrating to the young Alexander Pope the way later to make a fortune with his translation of Homer's *Iliad*.

That the association between Dryden and Tonson was close is testified to by their frequent disagreements, usually about money. These were always hastily patched up. Their relationship is usually affectionate:

I am ashamd of my self, [Dryden writes] that I am so much behind hand with you in kindness. above all things I am sensible of your good nature, in bearing [me] company to this place [Clapton in Northamptonshire]. . . .

This letter from Dryden to Tonson suggests the degree of their intimacy. Samuel Johnson may have been drawing on experiences of his bookseller father when, in *The Lives of the Poets*, he wrote of the Dryden-Tonson relationship:

Dryden had probably had no recourse in his exigencies but to his bookseller. The particular character of Tonson I do not know: but the general conduct of the traders was much less liberal in those times than in our own; their views were narrower, and their manners grosser. To the mercantile ruggedness of that race, the delicacy of the poet was sometimes exposed.

At all events it is generally agreed that here Johnson is less than fair to Tonson.

Through Dryden, Tonson would have met William Congreve, Nahum Tate (infamous for rewriting *King Lear* with an upbeat ending), the critic Thomas Rymer, Thomas Otway, Samuel Garth, the poet and diplomat Matthew Prior, and Joseph Addison, all of whom he would later publish.

For Tonson, Dryden produced the vast bulk of his poetic output: about forty thousand verses, mostly of translations. That the relationship endured is a testimony to how necessary it was for both men. Dryden was soon to follow his master James II into the Church of Rome, and he always remained a staunch Tory and upholder of what he saw as the legitimate Stuart line of succession to the throne, in contrast to the Protestant Tonson. In a moment of exasperation with what he perceived as Tonson's meanness, Dryden wrote the terrible beginning of a satire:

With leering Looks, Bullfac'd, and Freckled fair,
With two left Legs, and Judas-colour'd Hair,
With Frowzy Pores, that taint the ambient Air . . .

Dryden sent these verses to Tonson with a threat to continue if Tonson did not make him a satisfactory offer. At other times Dryden was worried, not about being paid, but being paid in the right coinage:

You know money is now very scrupulously receivd: in the last wch you did me the favour to change for my wife, besides the clipd money, there were at least forty shillings brass.

"The coinage at this time was in a deplorable state," unhelpfully comments Charles Ward, the editor of the Dryden letters. In another letter to Tonson, Dryden wrote:

I shall loose enough by your bill . . . for after haveing taken it all in silver & not in half Crowns neither, but shilling and sixpences, none of the money will go; for which reason I have sent it all back again, & as the less loss will receive it in guinneys at 29 shillings each. Tis troublesome to be a looser. . . .

The correspondence is not all about money, however, and some details are irresistible. Dryden thanks Tonson for "the two Melons you sent I receivd before your letter, which came foure houres after: I tasted one of them, which was too good to need an excuse." Again: "I thank you heartily for the sherry; it was as you sayd, the best of the kind I ever dranke."

A writer whom Tonson may have met independently of Dryden was the playwright Aphra Behn, celebrated as the first woman to

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have made a living (however small) as a writer in England. Tonson's grandmother had taken over the family business on the death of her husband, and so Tonson would see nothing odd in a woman's working for her living. At all events, he published in 1681 the sequel to Mrs. Behn's popular play *The Rover,* a volume of her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1684), and various other works; he stood surety for her for a loan of six pounds from a certain "Mr. Bags," and anonymously wrote and published commendatory verses "To the Lovely Witty *Astraea,* on her Excellent Poems."

Tonson certainly knew of Milton before Milton's death in 1674, and he tried to obtain some memento of him. At least they lived in the same area of London, came from the same social class, and shared something of the same political outlook. Tonson's attitude toward Milton is one of enthusiasm for his verse, veneration for his memory, and a common approach to his political attitude.

Tonson's involvement with Milton's work is long and complicated, and so a degree of brisk summary is in order. *Paradise Lost* was first published in 1667. For this Milton was paid five pounds by the printer Samuel Simmons. The work did not become immediately famous or even well known. These facts caused much outraged comment—indeed, consternation—in the eighteenth century when they were constantly rehearsed. (A further sum of five pounds was paid in 1669 when the first edition of about thirteen hundred copies was exhausted.) Simmons did nothing for five years and then, perhaps spurred into action by the announcement of John Dryden's "Heroick Opera" based on *Paradise Lost, The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man*—it is in heroic couplets, very absurd to us today and a by-word for Restoration bad taste—Simmons published a second edition in 1674, the year Milton died.

A third edition of *Paradise Lost* was published in 1678, the year Tonson began publishing on his own. Tonson gradually began to buy up all Milton's copyrights, not simply those of *Paradise Lost.* According to R. G. Moyles, the most recent scholar to have concerned himself with the text of *Paradise Lost,* "There is no evidence that Milton . . . paid close attention to its printing."

The first three editions had been quartos or octavos. Tonson decisively changed that. When he came to publish the fourth edition in 1688, it was to be in a large folio, with high-quality paper, wide margins, and clear type, and with twelve "sculptures" [illustrations]—the first edition of Milton to be so accompanied.

Tonson's edition was published by subscription and was altogether worthy of the great poem it bore. Because of Tonson's known Whiggish sympathies, it is sometimes assumed that the publication of the fourth edition of *Paradise Lost* is connected in some way with the Whig triumph at William of Orange's accession to the throne in 1688, known as The Glorious Revolution. Even Milton's normally unexcitable biographer, W. R. Parker, writes, "The 1688 edition was an event of both social and patriotic, as well as literary, significance; it was, of course, the year of the Revolution, and some of Milton's unpoetical causes seemed at last on the verge of triumph." There is no evidence for these connections. Indeed, Tonson was soliciting subscriptions in 1687.

For the 1688 edition, Tonson commissioned an epigram from Dryden to be engraved below Milton's portrait:

> Three *Poets,* in three distant *Ages* born,
> *Greece, Italy* and *England* did adorn.
> The *First* [Homer] in loftiness of thought
> Surpass'd;
> The *Next* [Virgil] in Majesty; in both the *Last.*
> The force of *Nature* cou'd no farther goe:
> To make a *Third* [Milton] she joynd the former
> two.

The epigram is dominated by Dryden's obsessive concern with poetic succession, and Tonson need not have shared this concern but would have agreed with the high valuation implied.

In 1695 Tonson's third edition was bound up alongside Milton's *Poetical Works.* This edition had Patrick Hume's influential *Annotations on Milton's Paradise Lost.* Later, other commentaries would be added, including (most important among them) Addison's *Spectator* papers on *Paradise Lost,* which, it would seem, did much to give Milton's work the extraordinary "classic" status—almost synonymous with poetry itself—it enjoyed in the early eighteenth century.

Of course publication in a lavish, sumptuously bound and illustrated edition (such as is shown in the Tonson portrait referred to ear-

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lier) produced a book to be read in a gentleman's library (such libraries were starting about this period) rather than what we would think of as a user-friendly book today—a deficiency Tonson made good with three cheaper and smaller editions of *Paradise Lost* in the years following 1705.

In 1691, the year he published the fifth edition of *Paradise Lost,* Tonson published a collection of Rochester's *Poems* with such assurance that, until quite recently, scholars have been convinced that his collection must have been authorized by Rochester's family. (It may have been so, but there is no evidence for the assumption.) There were several grave problems in the way of producing an edition of Rochester's poems, especially for a respectable publisher such as Tonson aspired to be. The first problem was that Rochester was renowned for having been a spectacularly obscene poet and for leading a life of exemplary depravity. The only earlier collection of his poems, the various editions of *Poems on Several Occasions . . . By the . . . E. of R—-* (1680), was a collection of obscene poems by Rochester and by some ten other writers, without a publisher's name.

The imprint of the 1680 (non-Tonson) collection of Rochester's poems claims, falsely, that the book was printed in Antwerp. The printing is hasty, the presswork poor; it is altogether a tacky performance. Tonson's collection was largely based upon this work, but he covers his tracks well. He adds several poems previously published elsewhere. He boasts in the introduction (written by the noted critic Thomas Rymer) that his edition is expurgated (the older, and more robust, term for it was *castrated* or *gelded):*

> The *Publisher* assures us, he has been diligent out of Measure. . .that every Block of Offence shou'd be removed. So that this book is a Collection of such Pieces only, as may be received in a vertuous Court, and not unbecome the Cabinet of the Severest Matron.

Paradoxically, as has been pointed out to me by Mr. Jim McGhee, Tonson actually succeeded in some cases in making poems more obscene rather than less by the method. (In "Fair *Cloris* in a Piggsty lay," the excision of the final stanza in order to remove a reference to female masturbation, converts a dream of rape, which is offensive enough in all consequence, into an actual rape.) But on the whole the tendency of Tonson's volume of Rochester's poems was toward "decency." Tonson also drastically rearranges the poems in the 1680 collection, adds works already published, and (the details of why this is so are still obscure) prints for the first time several poems from manuscript. In other respects Tonson's 1691 volume has the look and feel of a collected edition: it contains elegies to Rochester's memory, is handsomely printed with heavy leading between the lines, and contains a prose work and a play by Rochester.

Despite his efforts at cleaning up Rochester, Tonson came under attack by implication for publishing filth in Jeremy Collier's bizarre and celebrated onslaught on the depravity of the Restoration stage, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), which attacked the bawdiness of the plays (many printed by Tonson), their blasphemy, and (perhaps this was the real matter of offense for Collier) their satires on the clergy. Collier's attack is best understood, perhaps, as a manifestation of "the British public in one of its periodic fits of morality," which is Macaulay's celebrated phrase from his review of Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* in the *Edinburgh Review.* Jeremy Collier, a "non-juring" clergyman (a clergyman who refused to take an oath of allegiance to William and Mary after their accession to the throne in 1689) and a Tory, may have had political motives in his absurd attack: most of the playwrights he attacks, with the exception of Dryden, were Whigs and soon to be members of the Kit-Cat Club. Collier's book had its desired effect. Narcissus Luttrell records in *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs*: "The justices of Middlesex did not only present [lay evidence before a grand jury against] the playhouses, but also Mr Congreve, for writing the Double Dealer; Durfey, for Don Quixot; and Tonson and Brisco, booksellers, for printing them." Other justices took the matter further, but as is often the case, it seems that this particular inquiry came to nothing, but it seems to have had the effect of frightening Tonson: his fifth and sixth *Miscellanies* (1704, 1709) are notably less coarse than the fourth (1694).

The times seem to have changed, too. By about 1700, when the Kit-Cat Club was in its infancy, Tonson was rich and at the head of

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his profession. He remained in charge of the publishing house until about 1720, when he handed over control to his nephew, Jacob Tonson II.

I shall briefly summarize the more interesting publishing projects undertaken by Jacob Tonson.

With Congreve, whose verse was published in the Dryden and Tonson *Miscellanies*, Tonson achieved perhaps his closest personal association with any writer. Tonson published Congreve's plays, both individually and in collected editions. Congreve stayed in Tonson's house in 1695 and possibly earlier. The closeness was to lead into new areas in the author-publisher relationship: they seem to have collaborated on such matters as the format, appearance, type, layout, and so forth of the book, in the three volumes of the collected *Works of Mr. William Congreve*, which followed Ben Jonson's example of a writer defying the "stigma" of print and presenting his collected works to the world.

During the period of their relationship, Tonson and Dryden must have discussed one of Dryden's great preoccupations, the terrible fissure in the fabric of English life and society brought about by the events of the civil war. Again and again in his writings Dryden implicitly sees the years 1640–1660 as a time separating and defining society into two parts, before and after. Dryden sees that the writers that have gone before are quite different from writers of his day: they are writers of "the great age before the Flood." A new attitude was called for, a new start, and Tonson may have felt this, too, in that he strives to present earlier writers and writers of his own time in the timeless guise of a "definitive" edition. Of English dramatists: Shakespeare in ten volumes (the first ever edition), Beaumont and Fletcher in seven volumes (1712), Otway (1712), Ben Jonson in six volumes (1716), Dryden (he had written to Congreve in a commendatory poem printed in Congreve's *Double Dealer* (1694), "Be kind to my remains") in six volumes edited by Congreve (1712), Vanbrugh (1719), and Shadwell (1720). Along with all these dramatists, most of them still familiar today, there is an equally astonishing series of poets: besides Dryden, Rochester, and Milton, there are Prior, Spenser, and Gay. Tonson began with the young Pope, publishing his *Pastoral* in *Poetic Miscellanies*, 1709. Later, Pope left him for the publisher Lintot, who he thought would pay him better (it's a testimony of sorts to both Pope and Tonson).

During the first two decades of the eighteenth century, Tonson made frequent trips to Paris and Amsterdam, partly to buy paper and type for his business. As a staunch supporter of the Whig government, he was at the same time the official government printer and (as it were) unofficial agent employed to report on foreign thinking, doings, and attitudes—the sort of thing that would be called "spying" today, though I doubt if there was anything of the sinister notion which that word suggests, or of its glamour. At the same time as he was printer to the government, as has recently come to light, Tonson indulged in some technically illegal "black" propaganda on behalf of the Whigs, printing and possibly writing a pamphlet that exploited the attempted Jacobite invasion early in 1708.

By this time an established bookseller and publisher, Tonson knew most of those people who were in positions of power and influence in the political and literary worlds and was himself regarded as a "character" and as a man of consequence in his own right. His properties were intellectual, rather than vast areas of land. Pope, who called him "genial [nourishing, life-giving] Jacob" in *The Dunciad*, described Tonson in his old age in a letter to Lord Oxford as "a Phaenomenon worth seeing & hearing . . . the perfect Image & Likeness of Bayle's Dictionary; so full of Matter, Secret History, & Wit & Spirit."

The culmination of Tonson's publishing career, and also the culmination of his orchestration of men of letters in a single endeavor, was the great Garth-Tonson composite verse translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in 1717. This was based firmly on the solid chunks that Dryden had translated between 1693 and 1700, amounting to about a third of the poem. There are indications that it had been discussed between Dryden and Tonson in the 1690s. The finished translation combined work by Addison, Congreve, Pope, Gay, and some ten others.

Tonson's achievement was to have altered the relationship between writer and publisher, and to have altered our perceptions about how works of literature should be presented, and to have some share in determining what these works should be, which has in essence remained the modern publisher's task.

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Listening Through the Jamming

MARCIN KRÓL

Radio Free Europe began in 1952. From its inception it became the fiercely hated enemy of all totalitarian leaders in Eastern Europe. Its creation constituted perhaps the most brilliant move against communism—more important, in my view, than embargoes, nuclear weapons, and various diplomatic and military pressures. The fact of its importance was quickly recognized by the Communists, who did all in their power to stop it. In the end, Radio Free Europe—and to a lesser extent the Polish programs of the BBC and the Voice of America—greatly influenced the nature of the détente and was decisive in helping to bring about the end of the Cold War.

My first memories of Radio Free Europe go back to when I was a boy of eight in Warsaw. Students were in those days obliged to wear red scarves at school. I recall coming home from school, removing my awful red scarf, changing out of my school uniform, and going off to play soccer on the field that we used between two houses bombed out during the war. Afterwards I returned to talk with my father, who taught at the Warsaw School of Engineering. Father was often tired, and so after a while I began my homework and he retired to his room.

After several minutes, I heard the characteristic sound of his radio as it scanned over the shortwaves. Enormous screeches, drumming sounds, and mysterious bleeps emerged from the radio, until, finally, father found what he wanted. What he wanted, of course, was the Polish program of Radio Free Europe. At home he had the luxury of listening to it at a relatively high volume, because we lived in a small two-family house, and the people who lived on the second floor were friends. Generally, people were fearful of listening to Radio Free Europe at a high volume, or even to tell one another what they heard over the station, and only slowly did they become brave enough to talk openly about it. Before then they would tell one another that they listened to Radio Free Europe because it had the best weather forecasts.

Several conditions defined the situation of the individual under totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe. Persecution and terror were among them; so was an endless amount of lies. What is perhaps less known—and has not yet been properly described—is how lonely everyone felt and how cut off from the greater tradition of Western learning and thought. In Poland, true enough, only a relatively small number of people were tortured or even arrested, but all Poles were sentenced to enforced solitude. Even the most innocent meetings were felt by the regime to be dangerous, at least before 1956. Family life flourished under these restraints, but one cannot live a full life only among the members of one's family. Listening to Radio Free Europe created for a vast number of Poles the perhaps artificial but nevertheless essential sense that one was living in larger company.

After 1956, more freedom was permitted in Poland. Some of the old youth organizations were restored and intellectual life at Warsaw University, which I entered in 1961, was fairly vigorous. But my professors in those days were, almost without exception, leftists, so-called revisionists, and I took my degree under Leszek Kolakowski, the most famous among them. I liked my teachers a great deal, but one can say about them that, in those days, only the left side of their brain seemed to be

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developed. They had nothing in principle against older Polish or Western traditions of the pre-war era, but the Poland of those days, for them, was a slightly ridiculous country dominated by nationalists, authoritarians, and the Church. They were, as I now think of them, political libertines.

I don't for a moment mean to glorify pre-war Poland, before the disastrous advent of the Communists. This can be much overdone, and now often is by Polish politicians with their own less-than-pure motives. But what communism did so effectively is block out the past in Poland in a way that short-circuited historical memory. Without the continuity of memory, a society can easily sicken. If we in Poland did not, it is largely owing to Radio Free Europe.

Radio Free Europe provided not only political news and commentary but a good deal of history, literary broadcasting, even cabaret. I remember many of the efforts of the aging and often second-rate actors who did the latter as slightly pathetic, but I listened nonetheless, fascinated by the older language, nearly forgotten allusions, different sensibility. Not all performers on Radio Free Europe were second-rate by any means. For many Polish (Hungarian, Czech, etc.) writers, intellectuals, and actors in exile, Radio Free Europe was a very important—for some the sole—source of income. Owing to this, we in Poland heard over the radio such serious literary figures as Witold Gombrowicz and Czeslaw Milosz, among others, who had escaped Communist Poland. Some of them would have been entirely forgotten but for the opportunity to communicate with their countrymen over Radio Free Europe. Among them was Roman Palester, a splendid composer, who felt he must flee Communist Poland, openly declaring that to think and continue his work he needed to stay in regular contact with European culture. Palester became a cultural editor of Radio Free Europe. His broadcasts, far from being monotonous anti-Communist propaganda, invariably provided serious and well-organized information about different facets of Western cultural life. Listening to them, one felt one's knowledge deepen and one's sensibility widen—and, as a result, one felt a little better able to withstand the inexorable grayness of communism.

My professors at Warsaw University did not really much care for Radio Free Europe. This they had in common with many academics in the West. I myself at one point went sour on it, though I never stopped listening to it. One's memory could store only so much material that had no connection with one's current reality. I did continue to enjoy the cabaret portions of the programming, which my parents could fill me in on from their own memories. After a while, too, the often second-rate jokes about the horrors of communism ceased being amusing. Communism itself had become so obsolete that it no longer even provided good fodder for jokes.

Some of the reasons for opposition to Radio Free Europe on the part of nascent intellectuals such as I then was are not very well known in the West. We were all, to greater or lesser extent, victims of Communist propaganda; few among us could avoid its effects altogether. I recall once that the secret police tried to persuade me (during an involuntary visit to their offices) that it was a great mistake for anyone from abroad to attempt to interfere in Polish affairs. The unspoken subtext here ran something like this: Look, we have made many mistakes, but we have to change things ourselves, without the help of outsiders, no matter who they are. Old patriotic phobias were being played upon here, for what was really being said was that, however bad the Polish Communists might be, they were much to be preferred to the Russians or the Germans, age-old enemies both.

Other Polish intellectuals disdained Radio Free Europe because they felt that there wasn't much to choose from between communism and anti-communism. This same line was not uncommon among Western intellectuals as well. Among Polish intellectuals, anti-communism came to be identified with crude nationalism, which was rightly in bad odor. Radio Free Europe, being anti-Communist, was thrown in with nationalism of this kind, which was all the reason many Polish intellectuals needed to avoid it. This was far from the truth. Under Jan Nowak-Jesioranski, Radio Free Europe's director for nearly thirty years, the station was generally quite catholic in its political and ideological sympathies.

The importance of information and of disinformation is fairly well known, but it would be difficult to find another case in history like that in Poland where large historical events

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followed from the dissemination by Radio Free Europe of what might have been thought obvious facts. The story of Jozef Swiatlo is a case in point.

Jozef Swiatlo was deputy director of the department in the Polish government whose task it was to deal with—and often discipline—party officials. In 1954, Swiatlo discovered that his own arrest was imminent, and so he escaped to the West. After much complicated discussion, the decision was made to put Swiatlo on the air. United States intelligence officers were apprehensive, not being altogether certain what the effect of his broadcasts might be. In fact, as it turned out, they might have been the single most important event leading up to the "revolution" within Poland in 1956.

What Swiatlo did was reveal the mechanical inner workings of the Polish secret police. The facts that he conveyed, though not well known to the general public in Poland, were of course known in a general way to party functionaries and others among the ruling class. Yet, until Swiatlo set out his story, people, even among this Communist ruling class, did not quite imagine how dangerous the secret police were to their own well being. The effect of Swiatlo's broadcasts, then, was to produce a revolt among this ruling class by lucidly showing how, under present arrangements, not even the highest party leaders were safe. From this point on, the power of the Polish secret police began to be dismantled. This was a decisive action. The regime that begins to reform itself, as Toqueville long ago explained, becomes extremely vulnerable. (One should add that when Gomulka took power in 1956, he immediately sensed that, without the power of the secret police behind him, his own condition was parlous at best; and although he was personally persecuted in the Stalinist period, he nonetheless stopped all efforts to dissolve the secret police.)

The Swiatlo broadcasts were spectacular in their consequences, but later—in the 1960s, 1970s, and even in the 1980s—Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and the Voice of America played a tremendously important function in a most interesting dialectical game. To understand this game, one must understand something of the principles on which communism was based in Poland. After 1968, when the remnants of the pure Communist creed were altogether compromised, rule in Poland was not by terror and ideology (as the classic totalitarian systems described by Hannah Arendt were) but by mild terror and, a new element, television.

Mild terror, with implicit threats of worse terror, kept the Polish people relatively quiet, but, with the disappearance of believable ideology, the party leaders had nothing positive to offer. Some rather weak efforts aimed at constructing something called a socialist consumer society were put into place with some success between 1972 and 1975, owing to the foolishness of such Western leaders as Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, who thought that by infusing money into the Polish economy they would make the regime more liberal. (It became, in fact, less liberal.) But the socialist consumer society was bound to fail, which it soon enough did.

In the place of ideology, in the place of a functioning economy, the regime had nothing to offer but television. We were shown American movies, light French soft porno, and much else in the way of entertainment. And above all, we had our leaders ubiquitously on television. So often did they appear on the television screen, and with so much obvious energy devoted to doing so impeccably, making the most careful political pronouncements, that soon one came to suspect that they only existed because of the fact that they were on television. During this period it sometimes seemed that television was the only glue that kept Polish society together.

The active opposition movement in Poland—I am not referring to dissident activities within the Communist party—began around 1967, was suppressed after the events of March 1968, and reborn with greater dynamism in 1975. The first serious public act was the signing of an open letter, in the autumn of 1975, by fifty-nine Polish intellectuals protesting amendments to the national constitution; not least in dispute were the phrases announcing "the leading role of Party" and continued "friendship with the Soviet Union." From this began the Committee for the Defense of the Workers, out of which Solidarity was born, and other activities were to follow.

The official Polish press and television began a vehement campaign against the signers of the open letter protesting the amendments to the constitution. Interestingly, the open

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letter was never published in the Polish press and, in theory, no one was supposed to know about its existence. Why, therefore, was a campaign against it needed?

It was needed because news of the open letter was broadcast over Radio Free Europe and other Polish-speaking Western broadcasting outlets. The Communist authorities assumed that everyone in Poland listened to Radio Free Europe and knew all about the open letter. And they were correct. Radio Free Europe made good use of the letter, offered biographical sketches of the people who signed it, and broadcast numerous commentaries on its implications. If the Communists existed chiefly owing to television, we, the opposition, in the same sense, could be said to exist owing to Radio Free Europe. And each side was completely aware that this battle was being fought in these media.

Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and the Voice of America were dangerous to the Communist regime not only because they provided true information about the state of the world, but because they also gave a voice to the opposition. It must be remembered that before the advent of Solidarity, roughly in 1980, people who actively opposed communism in Poland were relatively few in number—a couple of thousand at best. (Now, as with the French Resistance after World War II, a great many people in Poland boast that they were in the opposition long before Solidarity, but it is not true.) Without the knowledge of its activities gained through the outlet offered by Radio Free Europe, this opposition may well have disappeared.

It was really quite dangerous to be discovered making contact with any of the journalists working for Radio Free Europe. I did so myself, many times, but the director of the Polish Section gave me a code word to use with his secretary whenever I telephoned while I was traveling abroad. Even his secretaries were not always considered above suspicion, and there were good reasons for suspecting that the Polish secret police may have tapped the phone lines in the Radio Free Europe offices in Munich. The Polish KGB did all in its power to reduce the influence of Radio Free Europe, and there were various stories of their attempts to penetrate it with spies. Not proof but even a strong suspicion that one was in contact with anyone from Radio Free Europe could result in having one's passport taken away for several years. Notwithstanding all this, a fairly continuous flow of information found its way to Radio Free Europe.

Here it must be added that, within Poland, we felt the need to play, with some subtlety and restraint, the valuable instrument that we knew Radio Free Europe to be. Useful though it was, news given to Radio Free Europe had to be carefully orchestrated. Say, for instance, that people in opposition to the regime were collecting signatures under an open letter or proclamation of some sort (and there were a great many such in those days), we might first send the letter or proclamation itself without the signatures. We might hold back the signatories' names lest we offend some people who were not approached for signing the document; and then, on the other hand, there was always the danger of exposing the people who had collected the signatures. Nothing, under communism, was simple.

The people who ran Radio Free Europe were most sympathetic about such matters. Only rarely did mistakes occur. This was in good part owing to their reasonableness and calm way of doing business. In Munich, too, they knew, as we in Poland and Hungary did not always know, that the Western powers, though very much on our side, were not prepared to offer serious military help to insurgents against Communist regimes who might wish to go it alone. In this regard they provided a useful sense of restraint, of limitation, about how far we could expect to go.

After the glorious events of 1989, when the Polish people were able to free themselves from the Communists, many people stopped listening to Radio Free Europe. But soon after freedom arrived in Poland, it became apparent that it is much easier to introduce democratic institutions and to set up the beginnings of a free-market economy than it is to develop a true democratic mentality. When it came to the Polish media, the new political parties, perhaps naturally so, wanted each to have its own press, rather than to cultivate an independent press; and all quarreled about access to what had once been government television.

Much bickering followed. Television time was so carefully divided up among political candidates and the coverage of the press tended to be so splintered that once again Poles found themselves turning to Radio Free Europe. It was professional, it was indepen-

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dent, and it was not afraid to introduce important questions and issues of the kind politicians prefer to evade. Then, too, even in a free Poland, political pressure can be exerted on people who do not have much journalistic experience or who retain the habits of hacks. In Poland today a great many of our journalists took their training under the Communists, and a great many others are young and inexperienced and hence prone to fall under the sway of politicians, the Church, or any lobby that is skillful at making use of them. Perhaps a new generation of journalists will learn to surmount such obstacles. Until that time comes, we still have journalists from Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and the Voice of America to provide some notion of what serious journalism is and how important it can be.

Fathers and Sons

M. E. MORROW

What would my father say to me
If we could meet just once again
Alone . . .
Especially if we could meet in light
Where no shadows could exist
Between our separate ways,
Our separate thoughts and dreams.
Would he say—
The same things I would say to my sons
If we could meet just once again
Alone . . .
Would we talk of sacrifice,
Success, the scales of human worth
Or would we be as silent as before
Knowing all too well—what fathers' fathers
Just as sons' sons have always known
The myths are true and each must die
Alone . . .

✪ M. E. MORROW is a retired teacher and physician.

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Alignment

JANE SCHAPIRO

When was it exactly I stopped lifting my feet over railroad tracks
or grasping
a button when a siren passed? Whose illness or death
convinced me
I no longer needed to stare at the sun or locate an
evening's first
star? If fate had played along I might still be obliging, trading
an act for
a consequence. Instead I wait for the unsolicited response, like that day
in Spokane
when he told me we weren't working out. After I boarded the bus and
burst into
tears, my loneliness spewing out, the driver announced Mount
St. Helens
has blown, the city was slipping beneath its ash. Once in a while the
world and I
coincide, and these coincidences I save like coins won in a
slot machine.
Compared to bleeding stones and parting seas, they're small change;
a rabbit
screaming outside seconds before my labor began, our snowman collapsing
the morning
I learned of my grandfather's death. Sometimes I'm tempted to join
those people
who travel from eclipse to eclipse. Aligning themselves,
they enter
into that brief collusion between sun and night.

✪ JANE SCHAPIRO's poems have appeared in the *Gettysburg Review*, the *Black Warrior Review*, and *Poetry East*.

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Nat King Cole

TERRY TEACHOUT

Last summer, the radios of America rose up in rebellion against the oligarchy of rock and rap and started broadcasting something completely different: the suave tones of a long-dead pop balladeer. Nat King Cole and his daughter Natalie, who was only fifteen years old when her father died of lung cancer in 1965, were reunited by means of modern recording technology for a duet version of Cole's 1951 hit single "Unforgettable," an old-fashioned love song redolent of the far-off days of bottled milk, cheap gasoline, and Burma-Shave. To the amazement of the popular music industry, "Unforgettable" flew to the top of the pop charts, and the album from which it came, a collection of twenty-four standards originally recorded by Cole and remade to excellent effect by his daughter, along with its impressive sales, won seven Grammy awards. Not only did Natalie Cole's flagging musical career suddenly leap back into high prominence, but a new generation of listeners discovered, forty years after the fact, one of American popular music's most distinctive singers.

All in all, 1991 was a very good year for Nat Cole. St. Martin's Press published Leslie Gourse's *Unforgettable: The Life and Mystique of Nat King Cole*, the third full-length biography of Cole to appear to date. Capitol Records continued to transfer his classic albums of the fifties and sixties to compact disc. Stash Records began to issue a series of CDs derived from airchecks of Cole's late-forties radio series. His television shows were repackaged, syndicated, and released on videocassette. Even PBS, always on the qui vive for low-budget, middle-of-the-road programs suitable for broadcast during pledge week, aired a Cole documentary called, predictably but not inappropriately, "Unforgettable."

But the most welcome tribute to Nat Cole to appear in 1991 was an entirely unexpected, even quixotic venture: an eighteen-CD set called *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio*.* This bulky compendium (it weighs two pounds and comes in a squat black box the size of a small tombstone), released by Mosaic Records, contains 349 recordings made between 1943 and 1961 by the King Cole Trio, which featured Cole on piano and vocals, accompanied by electric guitar and bass. It was with the King Cole Trio that Nat Cole cut the records that first brought him fame, including "Straighten Up and Fly Right," "Route 66," "It's Only a Paper Moon," and "For Sentimental Reasons." In 1951, Cole stopped recording regularly with the trio and began to work as a stand-up singer, the trade term for a singer who stands up in front of an orchestra (as opposed to sitting down at a piano). Few of his latter-day fans knew that he had once played piano, much less that he was a jazz pianist of distinction. For jazz musicians, however, Nat Cole's main claim to fame was his work with the King Cole Trio and as pianist on a handful of other jazz recordings made during the forties and fifties.

Older listeners who remember the King Cole Trio tend to identify it with catchy nonsense songs like "The Frim Fram Sauce," or

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* *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio* is available only by mail order from Mosaic Records, 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902-7533.

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ballads like "Sweet Lorraine." But the trio was first and foremost a jazz group, and the list of important jazz pianists influenced by the playing of its leader includes Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Tommy Flanagan, and Hank Jones. While most critics have tended to overlook or underrate Nat Cole's playing, the shrewdest ones know better. "I have often thought," Gene Lees has said, "that if I were forced at gunpoint to name my favorite jazz pianist, I just might say 'Nat Cole.' " Gunther Schuller, writing in *The Swing Era*, praised Cole as "not only one of the most outstanding jazz pianists of his day but stylistically one of the most advanced." Whitney Balliett argues that "Cole belonged with Earl Hines and Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson, from all of whom he learned, and if he had concentrated on playing rather than on singing he might well have outclassed them all."

Balliett's careful words of praise imply that Cole chose in the end not to take his piano playing seriously, an apparent allusion to what might be called the "legend" of Nat King Cole as failed jazzman. This legend, long accepted as fact by many jazz critics and historians, runs as follows: In the beginning, Nat Cole was a pianist of no mean talent, but he started down the fatal path of artistic compromise as soon as he signed with Capitol Records in 1943. Capitol's money-hungry executives quickly seduced him into featuring his singing instead of his piano playing, performing saccharine ballads instead of swinging jazz standards and, eventually, working with studio orchestras instead of with the less-commercial King Cole Trio. The success of "The Christmas Song," a 1946 recording in which Cole and the trio were backed by a string section, brought an end to Nat Cole's career as a serious artist. He had (as a *New York Times* music critic recently put it) "capitulated to the evils of the capitalist system," leaving his great potential unrealized.

This lurid tale is similar in outline to the more widely circulated fable of how cornetist Bix Beiderbecke allegedly "sold out" to the evil forces of commercial music by joining Paul Whiteman in 1927. Both legends are loosely based on the truth, but neither one stands up to careful scrutiny. To begin with, Nat Cole was a singer of real stature, Frank Sinatra's only rival as the most distinguished popular vocalist of the fifties. Moreover, he began to sing in public not in 1943 but in 1937, shortly after the King Cole Trio was formed. Finally, the story of how Cole sold his soul to Capitol Records for a mess of pottage cannot easily be reconciled with the actual evidence of the 349 performances collected in *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio*. Some are jazz oriented, others purely popular, but virtually all, early and late, are the work not of a cynical purveyor of musical pablum but of a jazz pianist of the first order.

The remarkable consistency of Cole's playing has long been obscured by the fact that most of the King Cole Trio's recordings have been out of print for years. Until the Mosaic set came along, there had never been more than twenty of the trio's Capitol sides available in this country at any one time since the fifties. Today, listeners interested in Cole's work as a pianist can hear him not only on *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio* but on CDs issued by MCA, Laser-Light, Savoy, and Stash, which contain trio performances recorded either for other record labels or for radio broadcast. Ironically, the glut of King Cole Trio material now available on CD makes it necessary to sift through a good deal of chaff in order to hear the group at its best, though at least half of the material reissued by Mosaic, much of it unreleased until now, is first-rate.

Now that Cole's early recordings are back in print, a factually reliable, critically sound study of his life and work is needed. None of the three currently available biographies is even remotely satisfactory. (The best of the lot is Leslie Gourse's new book, which is ineptly written but reasonably informative.) The Mosaic set contains a sixty-four-page booklet, but it is for the most part the work of Will Friedwald, a critic for the *Village Voice* whose occasional insights into Cole's work are embedded in a coarse, self-regarding prose style whose sheer vulgarity is numbing. Fortunately, Nat Cole's recordings tell his musical story as eloquently as any biography could. If one listens, it is hard not to come away feeling that his work as pianist for the King Cole Trio is one of the most impressively sustained achievements in the history of jazz.

Nathaniel Adams Coles (with an *s*) was born in Montgomery, Alabama, on March 17, 1919. In 1923, his family joined the great northward

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migration of southern blacks. The Coles moved to the south side of Chicago, where the Reverend Edward James Coles, Nat's father, became minister of the Second Progressive Baptist Church, most of whose members were, like the Coles, from Alabama. Nat's mother Perlina, who led the choir, encouraged her children to study piano. (All four Coles boys would grow up to be professional musicians.) Nat was later drafted to play organ at his father's church services, but traces of the music he heard in the streets of Chicago soon began to creep into his playing. "My church work was a constant worry to Dad," he recalled. "I was inclined to play the accompaniments too much on the hot side, which resulted in a familiar raising of the eyebrows that meant, 'Tone it down, son, or take the consequences later.' "

Nat spent most of his spare time as a young boy hanging out in the alleys behind Chicago's jazz clubs. "Our house was near the old Grand Terrace," he remembered years later, "and I spent many a night in the alley listening to Earl Hines for ideas." Hines, by far the most revolutionary jazz pianist of the twenties and early thirties, discarded the ragtime-derived "stride" style favored by James P. Johnson and Fats Waller in favor of a more rhythmically complex solo style, popularly known as "trumpet-style piano," that made use of crisply played right-hand octaves and jagged, irregular accompanying patterns in the left hand. Hines recorded extensively in 1928, both on his own and with Louis Armstrong and Jimmie Noone, and these recordings influenced countless younger pianists, including Nat Cole. "Everything I am I owe to that man," Cole said of Hines, "because I copied him."

In 1935, Nat dropped out of high school, dropped the *s* from his last name and joined his brother Eddie in a six-piece group called Eddie Cole's Solid Swingers. The Solid Swingers recorded four sides in 1936 for Decca's "Sepia Series" on which the young Nat Cole can be heard playing in an immature but surprisingly confident imitation of Hines's early style. Later that year, Nat married a chorus girl named Nadine Robinson, and in the spring of 1937 the couple moved to Los Angeles. After several months of scuffling to make a living, Cole was invited to put together a band to play at a Hollywood nightclub called the Swannee Inn. The Swannee Inn was so small that Cole decided not to use a drummer, settling instead for a three-piece combo. ("You couldn't get fifty people into it," a friend of Cole's remembered. "Once the bass and guitar joined the piano, there was even less space for customers. And if a drummer showed up, the group would displace another ten customers.") Initially billing themselves as King Cole and His Swingsters, Cole, guitarist Oscar Moore, and bassist Wesley Prince spent the next six months at the Swannee Inn. Cole doubled as the trio's lead singer. "I was lucky that I could sing a little," he told an interviewer in 1950, "so I did, for variety. The vocals caught on."

Cole, Moore, and Prince made their first recordings as a group in the fall of 1938 for Standard Transcriptions, a company whose long-playing discs were sold directly to radio stations for broadcast use. Most of the tunes heard on the trio's early radio transcriptions are either jivey novelty songs sung in unison by all three musicians or simple, riff-based jazz instrumentals. Musically speaking, the most striking thing about these recordings is the absence of a drummer. Nat Cole was not the first jazz pianist to lead a drummerless trio, but he was the first to grasp fully the musical possibilities of this unorthodox instrumentation. Most pianists in groups that work without a drummer tend to overplay in order to fill up the empty musical space and provide additional rhythmic impetus. Cole moved in the opposite direction, responding to Moore's strong rhythm-guitar playing and Prince's solid harmonic support by simplifying his own playing, which became steadily cleaner and less cluttered.

The King Cole Trio made its first commercial recordings in 1940 for Ammor and Decca. Moore, who played acoustic guitar on the trio's earliest transcriptions, had switched to hollow-bodied electric guitar, allowing his bluesy solo work and contrapuntal background figures to stand out in higher relief; Cole had lightened up his florid, Hines-based style still further, and his arrangements had become tighter and more imaginative, suggesting that he was listening closely to the John Kirby and Benny Goodman sextets. Three years later, Cole and his colleagues would be playing better material, and playing it with considerably more finesse, but the broad outlines of the King Cole Trio's mature style had already been worked out by 1940.

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Even at this early stage, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman's vibraphonist, was so taken by the group that he tried to hire Cole, Moore, and Prince to play in the rhythm section of his first big band, though he had to settle for using them on eight well-received small-group recordings made for Bluebird in the summer of 1940.

By 1943, the King Cole Trio had, in Will Friedwald's words, "climbed about as high within the confines of jazz and show biz as was possible for a black unit—only a step beneath the Ellington-Jeffries, Hines-Eckstine, Webb-Fitzgerald, Louis Jordan, Basie, Louis Armstrong, and Cab Calloway acts as box-office draws." No other small jazz group had ever become so popular with the general public, and Cole was justly proud of this achievement. "You have no idea how much satisfaction I get from the acceptance of the trio," he told a journalist a few years later, "because we opened the way for countless other small groups. Units before that were strictly for cocktail lounges." But by the time Cole gave this interview, he had long since broken through the concrete ceiling that kept most black musical acts from reaching the highest peaks of celebrity. At the end of World War II, Nat Cole would be not merely a respected jazz pianist, but one of America's most successful singers, irrespective of color, period.

The King Cole Trio moved decisively into the larger world of popular music when it signed with Capitol Records in 1942. The songwriter Johnny Mercer, Capitol's first president and producer of many of the trio's recordings, undoubtedly encouraged Cole to record more standards and to display his solo singing more prominently, but Cole was already thinking along the same lines. The fare recorded at the King Cole Trio's first three Capitol sessions, which took place in late 1943 and early 1944, consisted of a novelty tune, three Cole originals, a clever jazz version (arranged by Cole) of Sergei Rachmaninoff's familiar Prelude in C-Sharp Minor, and seven blue-chip standards: "The Man I Love," "Sweet Lorraine," "Body and Soul," "Embraceable You," "It's Only a Paper Moon," "Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good to You," and "What Is This Thing Called Love?" Cole sang on six sides and was joined by the trio for his own composition, "Straighten Up and Fly Right." The remaining five sides were polished jazz instrumentals featuring Cole and Oscar Moore. All twelve sides sold well, and "Straighten Up and Fly Right" became the group's first hit. After six years of hard work and low pay, the King Cole Trio had finally found success.

The group heard on these recordings stayed together until 1947. Bassist Johnny Miller had replaced Wesley Prince in 1943, just before the trio's first Capitol sessions. An unusually flexible and sensitive accompanist, Miller rarely soloed, leaving Cole and Moore plenty of room to stretch out. After six years of nightly collaboration, the two musicians knew each other's minds thoroughly, and Cole's dapper arrangements provided a stimulating point of departure for their improvised solos and spontaneous interplay. Both men paid close attention to the work of such progressive jazzmen as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and they quickly mastered the complex harmonic language of bebop, as can be heard on such postwar recordings as "The Geek" and "That's What." But the King Cole Trio always stayed true to the brightly swinging style of its first recordings for Capitol, a style that soon made it enormously popular not only with jazz musicians but with a mass audience.

The biggest factor in the growing popularity of the trio was, of course, Nat Cole's engaging light baritone voice, with its smooth, slightly grainy texture, wide-open vowels and soft southern articulation. For all the infectious charm he brought to silly novelty songs such as "Ooh, Kickeroonie" or comic blues numbers such as "Chant of the Blues," Cole was at his best in ballads, which he sang with a caressing, almost conversational intimacy. But it was as a pianist that the Nat Cole of the mid-forties was most memorable. Even the most commercially oriented of his trio recordings glitter with unexpected flashes of inspiration—an airy, loping eight-bar solo here, an oddly tilted introduction there. As the jazz pianist Dick Katz observes in "Nat Cole—The Pianist," a thoughtful essay included in the booklet to *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio*:

> The most striking feature of Cole's mature pianism was its singing quality. His single-note lines were very vocal-like and his actual singing perfectly matched his playing, both rhythmically and melod-

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ically. He was blessed with one of the most beautiful touches ever, pearly but firm, and he made everything he played come to life. . . . One of the reasons he never sounds dated, even today, is his utterly relaxed way with the beat. He had thoroughly absorbed the 12/8 feel (think 4/4 in triplets) of the Southern blues players and the boogie-woogie pianists. Also, he often favored those down-home, just-right, slow-to-medium walking tempos that the original Count Basie band played so well.

By 1945, Nat Cole was both a jazz star and a pop idol, and he seemed able to move from one role to the other with enviable ease. But he started to lose his musical footing in 1946, not long after he decided to leave his first wife and marry a younger woman. Though Maria Ellington had sung with the Duke Ellington band, she was not related to the bandleader. She came from a middle-class Boston family, and Cole was impressed not merely by her beauty but by her poise and sophistication. ("I've never heard a Negro woman speak so well before," he told a friend.) In the forties as today, many blacks equated skin color with social status, and Cole had always been self-conscious about his exceptionally dark skin and strong southern accent, which he apparently regarded as the external symbols of his own lower-middle-class background. In choosing to marry the light-skinned, socially confident Maria Ellington, Cole was perhaps reaching out for a place in society more appropriate to his newfound fame and fortune. What he could not have foreseen was the jolting effect his second marriage would have on his career.

As early as 1945, jazz journalists had begun to note the King Cole Trio's increasing tendency to emphasize popular music over jazz in its stage shows. Stung by what he saw as unfair criticism, Cole responded bluntly to a writer named Frank Stacy who questioned him about the trio's apparent slide toward commercialism:

> For years we did nothing but play for musicians and other hip people. And while we played that, we practically starved to death. When we did click, it wasn't on the strength of the good jazz that we played, either. We clicked with pop songs, pretty ballads and novelty stuff. You know that. Wouldn't we have been crazy if we'd turned right around after getting a break and started playing pure jazz again? We would have lost the crowd right away.

Determined never to lose the crowd again, Cole began to look for new ways to enhance the King Cole Trio's popular appeal. In 1946, he asked Capitol Records to let the trio record Mel Torme's "The Christmas Song" with a small string section. The company's executives were skeptical, so he recorded the song with just the trio. "As soon as they played it back," he said later, "I knew it was wrong, and I finally convinced them to let me remake it with the string section added." The remake, which featured a simple string chart tastefully arranged by Charlie Grean, became the trio's biggest hit to date, and the ambitious Maria Ellington saw it not as a one-shot experiment but as a possible model for future recordings. According to Duke Niles, a New York song plugger, "Maria saw that Nat had a limited future as a jazz pianist. He couldn't just sit there and sing and become a big hit. He had to stand up and sing with strings."

By this time, Cole was obviously in need of a change of musical direction. The trio had long ago reached a near-perfect state of artistic equilibrium, leaving him with little room in which to maneuver. Cole was too gifted an artist to settle for repeating himself indefinitely, and he toyed restlessly with various innovations throughout 1946 and 1947. He recorded a pair of classically influenced original compositions called "In the Cool of Evening" and "Laguna Mood." He released *King Cole at the Piano*, an album of eight jazz instrumentals in which Moore and Miller acted solely as accompanists, allowing Cole to solo at unprecedented length and producing the brilliant "Blues in My Shower," perhaps his finest jazz recording. He added strings to the trio on "The Christmas Song" and used a full orchestra on "Nature Boy."

But the musical changes on which Cole finally settled would stun the jazz world. Acting at Maria's behest, he demanded that Oscar Moore and Johnny Miller accept a huge cut in pay. Both men, outraged by Maria's meddling, quit the group. ("Maria wanted to run the trio," Miller recalled. "That was the real reason the trio broke up.") Moore left in the fall of 1947, to be replaced by Irving Ashby, Lionel Hampton's rhythm guitarist; Joe Comfort, another Hampton veteran, took over for Miller the following year. Early in 1949, Cole hired Jack Costanzo, a heavy-handed bongo player who had previously worked with Stan Kenton, and changed the group's billing from

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"The King Cole Trio" to "King Cole and His Trio." Not long after Costanzo joined the group, Cole stopped recording standards and jazz originals, concentrating instead on vapid, synthetic tunes of the kind Frank Sinatra had in mind when he publicly blasted the "bloodless and decadent" songs that had become popular since the war. On most of these later recordings, Cole, Ashby, Comfort, and Costanzo were augmented by large studio orchestras and bland, anonymous-sounding vocal groups.

Cole's abrupt shift away from jazz is not hard to understand. The post-war American popular music scene was dominated by stand-up singers. Most of the big bands of the thirties and forties had folded, and instrumental jazz, which achieved a certain amount of general popularity during the swing era, lost much of its commercial appeal with the rise of bebop. It was no longer possible for Nat Cole to move freely between straight jazz and pop, as he had done during the mid-forties, and so he chose instead to move with the times. In 1946, Cole assured Frank Stacy that he had no intention of "fluffing off jazz." By 1948, his tone had changed: "We can't play too much jazz in theaters, and we can't put too much of it on record, but we're still playing it." In the fall of 1951, Cole quit playing jazz altogether and officially "disbanded" the King Cole Trio. Ashby, Comfort, and Costanzo were quietly replaced by John Collins, Charlie Harris, and the drummer Bunny Shawker, who accompanied Cole on nightclub dates and played on his recordings, virtually all of which were made with studio orchestras. Cole continued to play piano in public and on record from time to time, but he was for all intents and purposes a full-time singer from 1951 on.

Interestingly, Cole's decision to give up the trio had a positive effect on his singing. The clearest illustration of this can be found in the six King Cole Trio performances re-recorded in stereo by Cole, Collins, and Harris in 1961 for a Capitol "greatest hits" album collection called *The Nat King Cole Story*. In these recordings, collected in *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio*, Cole's voice has grown slightly deeper in pitch and considerably darker in tone, and his singing has become significantly larger in dramatic scale. (Ironically, these changes in timbre were in part the result of Cole's chain smoking, a lifelong habit that in all likelihood led to the lung cancer that killed him in 1965.) The easy intimacy of the 1943 recording of "Embraceable You" has given way to a richness and vibrancy that the younger, less experienced Cole could only suggest. The 1961 remake of "Embraceable You" has its own kind of intimacy, of course, but to hear it is to recognize at once that the spare, swinging elegance of the King Cole Trio would have been ill suited to the full-bodied singing heard on Cole's later recordings. By abandoning the trio in favor of orchestral accompaniments arranged by Nelson Riddle, Gordon Jenkins, and Billy May, Cole was able at last to realize himself fully as a singer, developing the mature sound heard on such all-vocal albums of the fifties and sixties as *Love Is the Thing* and *The Very Thought of You*.

The "new" Nat Cole was a singer who played piano rather than a pianist who sang. *Penthouse Serenade* and *After Midnight*, the only post-1951 recordings on which Cole played piano with a small jazz group, show the price he paid for this transformation. (The contents of both albums are included in the Mosaic set.) Delightful as these albums are, they are clearly the work of a part-time pianist, a gifted player whose improvisatory skills, no longer honed to perfection by nightly performances with a working group, are not quite equal to his wide-ranging musical imagination. The inevitable decline in Cole's playing was easy to overlook, for he was careful to stay within his now-limited technical means, but it was nonetheless noticeable, and it was no doubt for this reason that he never recorded another jazz piano album after 1956.

Did Nat Cole ever have any second thoughts about breaking up the King Cole Trio? He never admitted to them, but he often seemed a bit touchy when the subject came up. Always eager to please his fans, Cole usually made a point of playing a token piano solo or two at his later concert appearances and on most episodes of his short-lived late-fifties TV variety show, but he never failed to bristle whenever jazz critics complained about how he had abandoned full-time playing. On one occasion, he reportedly went so far as to call the piano "a millstone around my neck."

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Whatever his private reservations, it was as a singer of pop songs like "Unforgettable," "Mona Lisa," and "Too Young" that Cole achieved the mass popularity he had long sought. On the day after his death, *Variety* estimated that he had recorded six hundred songs, sold nine million albums, and grossed more than fifty million dollars for Capitol Records. All of these estimates, as it turned out, fell far short of the mark. Hundreds of unreleased Cole recordings would be issued by Capitol in the course of the following quarter century. Cole's albums continued to sell in large quantities after his death and continue to do so to this day. The Cole estate still brings in more than a half-million dollars in record royalties each year, and the success of Natalie Cole's remake of "Unforgettable" suggests that her father is likely to remain one of America's best loved and most financially successful singers for many years to come.

Contrary to legend, Nat Cole's popularity was not purchased at the expense of his artistic integrity. Those who criticize him for giving up the piano fail to recognize that the magic heard in his jazz piano playing of the forties did not suddenly dry up and blow away in 1951. It was now simply expressed in terms of a different "instrument"—his voice. As for the poor quality of the material Cole often chose to record, both as full-time pianist and as full-time singer, surely it is proper to judge him by his best work, of which there is a vast amount, than by his worst (of which, admittedly, there is also a vast amount). There is no reason why the fact that Nat Cole recorded such songs as "Bang Bang Boogie" and "Those Lazy-Hazy-Crazy Days of Summer" should reflect on such trio masterpieces as "Blues in My Shower" and "What Is This Thing Called Love?" or such vocal gems as Cole's 1956 recording of "Stardust," a flawless piece of ballad singing by any conceivable standard.

Anyone who listens to *The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio* from beginning to end is likely to come away from the experience inclined to see Nat Cole as embodying all of the myriad contradictions that run through the history of American popular music. Was he a serious artist or a pop star? In fact, it was Cole's singular good fortune to have it both ways. He spent the first half of his career as a peerless jazz pianist who gave great pleasure to ordinary listeners and the second half as a superlative popular singer whose best work was universally admired by jazz musicians. Who would willingly trade one Nat King Cole for the other—especially when, thanks to Mosaic Records, we can finally have both?

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About Distance

GREGORY DJANIKIAN

We had come out to sight constellations,
we had been looking for a long time
with chart and flashlight, some sense
of where we stood, the huge distances.

Anne was in the house reading,
my wife and kids were already asleep,
and we were having trouble with Delphinus,
Cygnus too, Draco had lost its tail,
half the sky could have been Pegasus.

"Mike," I said, "look, the Dipper,
Polaris, we could have something here."

It was dark except for the light
on Marcel Cotnoir's heifer barn.
Sometimes we could hear moos and bellows,
and the night before we had heard coyotes
(coyotes!) howling from one pasture to another.

"Mike," I said, "maybe it's this chart,
or maybe the Pleiades are really lost,
all these dots, Mike."

We had been looking with keen intent,
we had been trying to nail down a small piece
of the sky, and we had managed to say
the obligatory words like "steep" and "vast"
as new stars rose, others disappeared,
"vertiginous," we said, and finally, "geez."

Maybe we could have said other things,
something about the furthest star
or about the folly of longing too much,

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but our necks were beginning to ache
and we found ourselves looking at the faint
line of trees on the ridge of the hill,
and further down, we could make out
rail fencing against the Cotnoir house
and the mock orange by our roadside.

We could hear the river plainly now,
we could hear the wind through the cottonwoods
and Anne's voice suddenly from the doorway
calling to us, though we had already
begun moving in that direction,
already we were walking that way,
the house looming tall ahead,
balancing the sky on its spires,

and the two of us feeling the ground
lush and slippery under our feet,
turning imperceptibly eastward,
while all around us, dog, snake, bear, fish, bird,
were wheeling in the woods and waters, deeply alive.

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Survival and Ascendancy

FRANZ M. OPPENHEIMER

BENJAMIN DISRAELI LETTERS: 1842–1847. *Edited by M. G. Wiebe, J. B. Conacher, John Matthews, and Mary S. Millar. University of Toronto Press. $75.*

Of the primary crises of the soul
no history is ever written.
W. H. Auden

The fourth volume of Benjamin Disraeli's letters, like the three preceding volumes, is magisterially edited, annotated, and superbly produced. It covers the years from 1842 to 1847, the years during which Disraeli rose from a disappointed office seeker and unimportant backbencher to leader of a significant wing of the Conservative party and frontbencher.

Disraeli's rise was largely propelled by his rebellion against Sir Robert Peel, leader of the Conservative party and prime minister since 1841, the year he refused office to Disraeli. Disraeli's venomous attacks against the leader of his party were only secondarily grounded in differences with Peel's policies. The principal issue that produced Disraeli's final break with Peel—the repeal of custom duties on imported grain, or the Corn Laws—was one for which Disraeli may not have felt a passionate commitment. In fact, years later when Disraeli was prime minister, he opposed widespread agitation for the reimposition of the Corn Laws in the wake of four bad harvests.

The essential target of Disraeli's attacks was Peel's abandonment of the party platform on which he had campaigned and had been elected. Peel had run on the Corn Laws, just as in earlier campaigns he had opposed the Catholic emancipation that he put into effect as prime minister. That is why Disraeli called a "Conservative government an organized hypocrisy" and ridiculed "a sound Conservative government" as "Tory men and Whig measures."

Disraeli's conviction that distinct parties with articulated convictions on major policies were a necessary condition of a free people was at least as powerful a motive for his rebellion against the leader of his party as his own thwarted ambition. No mere careerist, no matter how wounded in his pride, would have dared to attack head on the most powerful man in the country without being able to count on an independent fortune or an influential body of supporters. No mere careerist would have dared to confront his prime minister in the Commons with words as passionate as:

> If you are to have a popular Government—if you are to have a Parliamentary Administration the conditions antecedent are, that you should have a Government which declares the principles upon which its policy is founded, and then you can have the wholesome check of a constitutional Opposition. What have we got instead? Something has risen up in this country . . . fatal in the political world, . . . we have a great Parliamentary middleman. It is well known what a middleman is; he is a man who bamboozles one party and plunders the other, till having obtained a position to which he is not entitled, he cries out, "Let us have no party ques-

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tions, but fixity of tenure." I want to have a Commission issued to inquire into the tenure by which Downing Street is held. . . . I hope I shall not be answered [by quotes from Peel from previous sessions of the House of Commons]. . . . What dreary pages . . . what predictions falsified, what pledges broken, what calculations that have gone wrong, what budgets that have blown up! And all this too, not relieved by a single original thought, a single generous impulse, or a single happy expression!

And there was more in the same tenor.

Disraeli's detractors have to this day attributed his vendetta against Peel to his resentment over having been refused office in 1841. This refusal had indeed been a traumatic shock. Disraeli had campaigned hard before the elections of 1841, and he had been a stalwart defender of Peel in the Commons and the press. Having been without the benefits of sensitivity training, Disraeli had probably forgotten the circumstances of his disastrous first meeting at a dinner party with Peel during which, as Disraeli wrote to his sister: "I made him look extremely small." The possibility of not being asked to become a part of the new administration after victory at the polls had not occurred to him. It rankled. As he wrote to his wife, Mary Ann, on February 24, 1842: "You cannot conceive how solitary I feel: utterly isolated. Before the change of government, political party was a tie among men, but now it is only a tie among men who are in office. The supporter of the administration, who is not in place or power himself, is a solitary animal. He has neither hope, nor fear."

There is little doubt that Sir Robert, on the other hand, had not forgotten the affront of fourteen years earlier, nor the increasing number of daggers thrown at him. After one of Disraeli's most vitriolic attacks in the Commons—"His life has been a great appropriation clause. He is a burglar of other's intellect . . . there is no statesman who has committed political petty larceny on so great a scale"—a stricken Peel struck back ad hominem. Why, he asked, if Disraeli really believed Peel's whole life to be one of political larceny, had Disraeli been "ready as I think he was, to unite his fortunes with mine in office?" This led to a "personal statement" by Disraeli that "I never directly or indirectly solicited office."

Historians and biographers of Disraeli have been at a loss to explain this denial when he had in fact written a letter to Peel with just that intention. G. E. Buckle, the greatest of Disraeli's biographers and the one most admiring of him, believed that Disraeli "for once lost his head, and grievously blundered." Buckle added that "it is impossible to believe that in the short space of three years he could have forgotten his letter of 1841," though he acknowledged that Disraeli had not kept a copy of that letter. Lord Blake (in his biography of 1966) thought "the most likely explanation" of what he called "reckless mendacity" "is panic . . . [I]t is not an episode on which his admirers care to dwell." And Sarah Bradford, in the most recent biography of Disraeli (published in 1982), had no doubt that Disraeli lied, as "he had lied before on the same point" to his constituents. To the question, "Why did Disraeli take the risk of being shown up as a liar?" which Peel could have done by producing Disraeli's letter, Sarah Bradford adopted Buckle's answer that "it was a panic reaction." The editors of these letters, while rejecting the "panic" thesis, do not supply an alternative explanation.

Yet for a Washingtonian, Disraeli's denial holds no mystery. In the first place, that famous letter of September 5, 1841, in volume 3 of Disraeli's letters, did not explicitly solicit office, to say nothing of any specific office. The solicitation is almost as obscure as the thank-yous to Monsieur Swann from the narrator's aunts in *Swann's Way*: "to be unrecognized at this moment by you appears to me overwhelming; and I appeal to your own heart . . . to save me from an intolerable humiliation."

In the second place, anyone with an ego as large as Disraeli's must overcome enormous inhibitions before he dares to force the moment to its crisis. If the result is rejection, the humiliation is felt as "intolerable" indeed. But fortunately most people, and in particular sensitive and ambitious politicians, have an enormous capacity to repress the recollection of a deeply embarrassing episode. That is all the explanation needed. Disraeli was too consummate a public figure to be thrown into a panic because of an attack he would have anticipated, had he remembered the implications of an old letter, or to tell a lie in the House of Commons knowing that written ev-

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idence of the truth was in the hands of the powerful person he attacked.

Disraeli's destruction of Peel is the most dramatic event during the period covered by these letters, and it made Disraeli's subsequent rise possible. But the period covered by these letters was crucial for Disraeli's development in other ways: he became the foremost spokesman for the Young England movement, and he wrote *Coningsby, Sybil,* and *Tancred,* three of his best novels (all of which are currently in print, *Sybil* in five different editions), in which he articulated the political vision of Young England. Moreover, he continued to be beset by overwhelming debts that he strove to hide from his wife. His mother died in 1847, and although he was not close to her, the death of a parent is always traumatic; and his father, in rapidly declining health, died in January of the year following. The start of the negotiations for buying Disraeli's country house, Hugheden, a major step in his life, also occurred in that period.

But Disraeli's letters during these years, unlike those collected in the three previous volumes, barely give us a trace of either the personal drama or of the great political upheavals he experienced. There are probably two principal reasons for this. His early confidant had been his sister Sarah, and in the first two volumes of correspondence Disraeli bares his soul in long and fascinating letters to her; the third volume covers his letters to Mary Ann during their courtship. But after his marriage, Mary Ann's jealousy stopped him from writing to his sister; and obviously there was no need to write to his wife from whom he was almost never separated. Only when Mary Ann saw good reasons for Disraeli's writing to his sister do the letters become reminiscent of those in the earlier volumes, as during the Disraelis' four-month stay in Paris (from September 1842 to the end of January 1843), where they probably went to save money. The most interesting parts of those letters chronicle Disraeli's surprisingly frequent meetings with King Louis Philippe, of which Disraeli was obviously proud:

> He was extremely gracious when he observed me, and after saying a few words expressing his pleasure that I had arrived, called to a courtier to present me to the Queen.

> It is rare to make the tour of a palace [the Tuileries] with a King for the Cicerone.

> You must understand that I am the only stranger who has been received at Court [because of the death of the Duke of Orleans]. It causes a great sensation here.

Historically, these letters from Paris are significant because of Disraeli's efforts to improve the relations between England and France and to combat the prevailing Francophobia in England. But most of these letters enumerate all the famous persons the Disraelis have met at balls, dinners, and receptions; the letters read like society columns.

With the exception of those Paris letters, the ones in this volume often consist of three lines or less or are prosaic and non-informative. For example:

> To Mary Ann Disraeli
>
> My dearest
>
> I must go into the City and see Lionel. Order the dinner at 1/2 past seven.
>
> Your own/
>
> D

Having no sympathetic correspondents, Disraeli poured his reactions into political events, his emotions and his political vision into his novels. Few authors capable of writing three long novels during four years of political battle could also have the time and energy necessary to write anything other than humdrum letters.

Disraeli's financial perils must also have weighed heavily upon him at this time, and in the index to this volume, the entries under "debts and creditors" take up a full column (by comparison the entries under "health"—a constant concern for Victorians—take less than a quarter of that space. Yet the letters give no more than factual references and at that usually obscurely. "And now, my dear Wright [Disraeli's solicitor and financial agent], I must beg your kindest exertions in this painful affair. You know my resources; my exact situation. Since my settlement with Houlditch [who held a bond for £3,300], I have no claims on my resources of any moment for the ensuing year." This comes from a letter dated November 16, 1843. Three years later we read: "You are aware of the present

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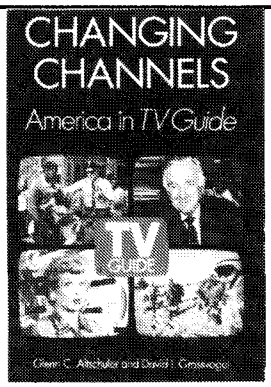

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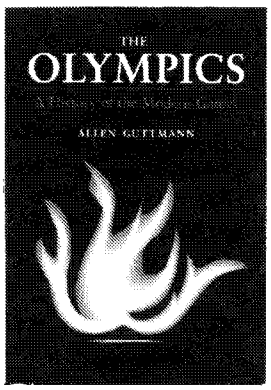

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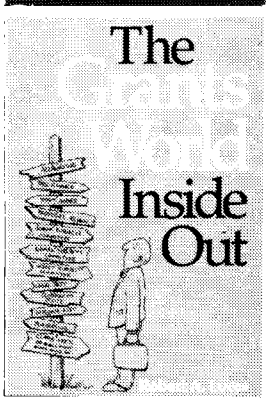

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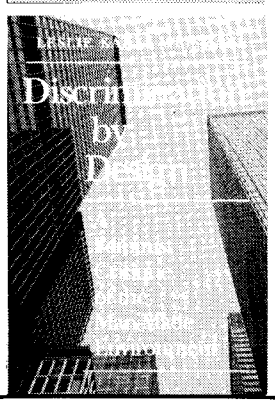

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critical state of my affairs." Almost four years later, on August 30, 1847, there seems to be barely any improvement: "In case anything happens here to place ample funds at our disposal," he wrote to Philip Rose, who by then had become his solicitor and financial agent and who was to become his executor, "I think it wd. be as well to make some arrangement with Houlditch & Hume." These passages are quoted at random and all give the flavor of dealing with debts, none of which would be understandable without the editors' footnotes.

By contrast, his novel *Tancred* is eloquent where the *Letters* are discreet. The novel shows that debts must have been a constant preoccupation of Disraeli in those years. Three somewhat repetitive passages exist on the subject, the second separated from the first by a hundred pages:

> I should be incapable of anything, if it were not for my debts. I am naturally so indolent, that if I did not remember in the morning that I was ruined, I should never be able to distinguish myself.

> Fakredeem was fond of his debts; they were the source indeed of his only real excitement, and he was grateful to them for their stirring powers.

> What should I be without my debts . . . dear companions of my life that never desert me! All my knowledge of human nature is owing to them.

Tancred was published in 1847, after Disraeli had recovered from the shock of being rejected for office and was capable of looking positively even at his financial plight. But, in September 1843, when he began *Coningsby* and the front bench of the Commons could not yet have seemed an achievable goal, his debts must have come close to crushing him. "You can do nothing if you be in debt," Disraeli makes Coningsby's mentor Sidonia tell him.

By the same token we must repair to *Coningsby* and *Sybil* to discover Disraeli's vision of Young England, a political group of a few young aristocratic M.P.'s within the Tory party, with a new vision of conservatism that is mentioned in the *Letters* only by factual references to a dinner here, a speech there, or an article in a newspaper.

To account for *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, it is essential to understand Disraeli's situation at the opening of the new Parliament in 1841. That situation must have been more profoundly discouraging for Disraeli than his biographers seem to have understood. Here was an ambitious man who had ventured all on a political career, the object of which was holding office once his party had won an election. Yet, after the victory of his party at the polls and his own re-election, Disraeli found himself an unimportant member of Parliament without even the emotional satisfactions of being in opposition. The disillusionment produced by this political impotence is reflected in the passage of the *Letters* quoted earlier about his utter isolation. Even as Hilaire Belloc half a century later translated his sense of impotence as a freshman member of Parliament into crypto-Fascist political theories that were highly critical of parliamentary government, Disraeli—at least as a first step in his emotional recovery—had to believe in a political system superior to the one that had humiliated him.

Coningsby and *Sybil* reflect, first, Disraeli's experience of total failure, expressed symbolically in the fate of the novels' principal heroes, Coningsby and, in *Sybil*, Egremont. Both heroes, like Disraeli, felt betrayed by a father figure on whom they had relied: Coningsby was led to believe that he would be the heir of his immensely rich and powerful grandee grandfather, Lord Monmouth, and as such be able to marry his love and pursue an idealistic career in politics, but he found himself disinherited and hence apparently unable to pursue his dreams. Egremont had been led to believe that his older brother, another noble lord who is both a tyrant and a heartless landowner, would pay the debts Egremont had incurred in his election campaign for the family seat in the House of Commons, but he was refused that help after he won the seat. Yet, by dramatic reversals of events, both heroes find themselves at the end of their stories with enormous fortunes, titles, their loves regained, and the freedom to battle for the ideals of Young England. Those dramatic reversals, contrived as they appear in the novels, are far less improbable than Disraeli's success in overthrowing Sir Robert Peel.

All of Disraeli's biographers, as well as many historians and essayists, have emphasized the vagueness of Young England's political ideas. Indeed, they are so vague that it

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is easier to summarize what they were against than what they were for. They were against Benthamite utilitarianism (it was Disraeli who first called it "the School of Manchester"), against the poverty and misery of rural and industrial laborers, against the predominance of the House of Commons over the queen and the House of Lords, against the domination of the Church of England by the House of Commons and by a prime minister responsible to it, instead of to the queen. They were for brotherhood among the classes and, as stated in *Coningsby*, saw "the peril of England" as the "decline of its character as a community." Yet, again quoting from *Coningsby*, those ideas held that "no error [is] so vulgar as to believe that revolutions are occasioned by economical causes."

The political ideas set forth in *Coningsby* presage, if not those of Italian fascism, those of a fascism with a human face, in particular those of José António Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Spanish Falangist party: "Let me see authority once more honoured; a solemn reverence again the habit of our lives; let me see property acknowledging, as in the old days of faith, that labour is his twin brother, and that the essence of all tenure is the performance of duty." And, in the light of this century, more ominously, we read: "Man is made to adore and to obey." But before dismissing Disraeli on that account, let me note another passage in *Coningsby* that shows Disraeli more than one hundred years ahead of his time: "The atmosphere . . . was not disturbed and polluted by the dark vapour which, to the shame of Manchester, still infests that great town, for Mr. Milbank [a *good* manufacturer] . . . took care to consume his own smoke."

If *Coningsby* presages some Fascist notions, *Sybil* anticipates some Marxist ones. Published in 1848, one year before *David Copperfield* and in the same year as *Das Kapital*, *Sybil* is one of the very first English novels that described the misery of the working class. But unlike Karl Marx, who never deigned to darken an actual factory gate but studied the condition of the proletariat in the comfort of London's West End and of the Library of the British Museum, Disraeli went to see the inside of factories and the slums in the North of England. No reader of *Sybil* can possibly believe that Disraeli's passionate sympathy with, and intensity of feeling for, industrial and agricultural laborers could have been exclusively based on contemporary English Blue Books, although he certainly also used data from them. Nor does it diminish the merits of *Sybil* as a signal for social justice. Beginning in the 1830s, social issues, and perhaps the very existence of the poor—who were totally ignored in the eighteenth century—were generally discovered in England; they became major political issues and contributed to the Chartist riots, which form an essential part of the plot of *Sybil*. For me, at least, the almost all-too-graphic descriptions in *Sybil* of hunger, dirt, infanticide, and every other kind of material and mental suffering endured by the poor are far more immediate than those found in Dickens and are almost as unbearable to read as are descriptions of Auschwitz. Here is how an industrial apprentice was treated by his lock manufacturing master:

> I should like to have a crown for every time he has cut my head open . . . once with a key, and twice with a lock; he knocked a corner of a lock into my head twice. . . . He hit me on the head with a hammer once. . . . I fell away that time . . . I had to go on with my work immediately; master said I should do my stint if I worked till twelve o'clock at night. Many's the ash stick he has broken on my body; . . . he cut my eyelid open once with a nutstick; cut a regular hole in it, and it bled all over the files I was working at.

All this "amid gutters of abomination, and piles of foulness, and stagnant pools of filth; reservoirs of leprosy and plague."

Unlike Dickens, Disraeli draws anti-capitalist, indeed virtually Marxist, political conclusions from what he describes:

> The Capitalist has found a slave that has supplanted the labour and ingenuity of man. Once he was an artisan; at the best, he now only watches machines; and even that occupation slips from his grasp to the woman and the child. The capitalist flourishes, he amasses immense wealth; we sink lower and lower, lower than the beasts of burthen; for they are fed better than we are, cared for more. . . . And yet they tell us that the interests of Capital and of Labour are identical.

Already in *Coningsby* Disraeli had called the

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working class the creators of wealth, and he recognized the reality of a class struggle, as exemplified in the Chartist movement, for which he felt much sympathy without agreeing with its goals. Nevertheless, during the course of the novel and the course of the maturing of Sybil's judgment, Disraeli becomes a deviationist from the yet unborn Marxism: revolution is destruction of the welfare of the poor, and work the basis of the general welfare. "When toil ceases the People suffer," says Sybil in disputing her father's advocacy of strikes. "That is the only truth that we have learnt, and it is a bitter one."

Liberal commentators generally dismiss the ideas of Young England as puerile and unproductive, and Disraeli's clarion calls for social justice as literary posturing. But Disraeli's immensely popular novels contributed to the public opinion that made possible the reforms of the 1840s, such as the Factory Act of 1844; and Disraeli's convictions, developed during the 1840s, made him responsible for the historic wave of social legislation under his government in the 1870s. In the words of G. M. Young: "The reforms of the forties satisfied the aspirations of the poor and the conscience of the rich, until a new tide set in and carried us forward again with the Education Act of 1870, and the legislation of Disraeli's Government, with which Young England, now grown grey, redeemed the promise of its far-off fantastic youth."

An imaginative analysis and appraisal of Disraeli's thoughts and emotions during the years covered by the *Letters: 1842–1847* remains to be written despite the exhaustive Disraeli literature. This review-essay can give only a severely limited glimpse of the turmoil of those years, but enough of a glimpse, I hope, to explain why Disraeli, who was concentrating on bringing about a political upheaval of historic dimensions and in writing three extraordinary novels, had no comparable energy left for letter writing.

This is why this volume of *Letters* is not for casual readers. For serious students of Disraeli, however, the volume will be indispensable, essential, like the bark of the hound of the Baskervilles, precisely for much that is not said—not said because the emotions were still too raw to be communicated in anything but fiction.

Culture Fair

CULTURAL EXCURSIONS: MARKETING APPETITES AND CULTURAL TASTES IN MODERN AMERICA. *By Neil Harris. University of Chicago Press. $55. Paper, $19.95.*

Reviewed by BENJAMIN MCARTHUR

Neil Harris forms a link between cultural history traditionally understood—as a chronicle of the high arts—and cultural history broadened by a newer, anthropologically inspired examination of a group's artifacts, institutions, and folkways. Harris's professional interests often concern the organization, presentation, and innovation of and in the arts. In *Cultural Excursions,* he explores these topics in novel ways, asking provocative questions and continually finding unexpected connections between artistic aspiration and cultural meaning.

Harris is the author of two earlier works, *The Artist in American Society* and *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*; his recent scholarship has been confined to essays, some published in less accessible journals and exhibit catalogs. The present volume is a collection of these essays. Such collections, of course, frequently lack a thematic center, and the impressive mix of topics presented here in *Cultural Excursions* would seem to compound the problem. But Harris finds several concerns into which his essays can be logically divided. First, he examines the history of cultural institutions, particularly museums and world's fairs. Second, he looks at the conceptually rich relationship of culture and the media, ranging from fiction to consumerism to music to cartoon heroes to connoisseurship. Finally, he explores the social history of art and architecture, casting a net over topics as diverse as parking garages and color television.

"Four Stages of Cultural Growth: The American City" displays Harris's gift for suggestive generalization. Where colonial cities were limited both in size and in their self-consciousness as social entities, notes Harris, the burgeoning antebellum cities hosted an

BENJAMIN MCARTHUR, professor of history at Southern College of Seventh-Day Adventists, is the author of *Actors and American Culture: 1880-1920.*

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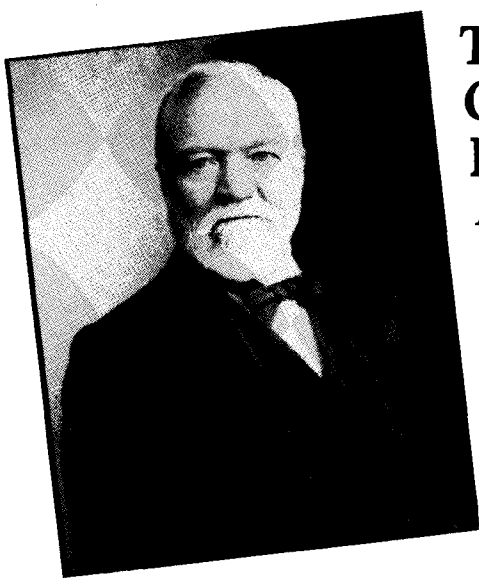

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impressive array of cultural institutions that served to integrate a democratic mix of peoples. After the Civil War, however, during an epic age of urban institution building, the emphasis shifted from democratic inclusion to the certifying of taste and social standing. Art museums, symphony halls, libraries—these became asylums both for art and for art's patrons. At the same time cities contained a mosaic of ethnic and working-class institutions, each contributing to the segregation of urban populations. Twentieth-century urban culture has been profoundly shaped by the mass media, which has extended the city's reach into the hinterland and challenged the authority of earlier cultural elites. By facilitating the transmission of urban pleasures to rural and suburban areas, the media, observes Harris, has tended to nationalize urban culture while paradoxically stripping cities of their monopoly on cultural institutions.

Though the late nineteenth century was marked by cultural division among classes and ethnic groups, there was one notable exception. The great world's fairs of Philadelphia, Chicago, and elsewhere sought by an act of will to impose unity upon America's disparate landscape. Harris rethinks the meaning of these displays of modern abundance in several essays. He sees American responses to Japanese fair exhibits (fascinated by their mix of traditional craftsmanship and modern efficiency) as mirroring contemporary concerns over America's path of modernization. More significant, the early world's fairs reflected a confidence in the ability to reshape urban areas. Fairs were conscious idealizations of city life and, as such, exerted tremendous influence through such architects as Daniel Burnham and the City Beautiful movement. Later fairs of the 1930s—in New York, Chicago, San Francisco—traded on futuristic themes. They were less connected to actual urban settings and thus, claims Harris, were less influential. More recent fairs in the 1960s and 1970s seemed even less sure of their message. All of this offered Chicago town fathers in the 1980s (for whom Harris prepared his historical overview) little encouragement to pursue plans for a five-hundredth anniversary celebration of America's discovery.

Cultural institutions, particularly museums, receive sustained attention in *Cultural Excursions*. Harris's four pertinent essays here are perhaps his most compelling, reflecting both his continuing engagement in current policy debates involving museums and libraries and his obvious commitment to their continued social vitality. The essays also afford an excellent example of history's value for institutional self-scrutiny.

According to Harris, in the nineteenth century museum directors could collect and exhibit, confident in the support both of wealthy patrons who found legitimation through patronage and of a public enthusiastic about their displays. But the twentieth century brought complications. During the inter-war years museums failed to adopt the exciting display techniques pioneered by department stores. To a public accustomed to enticing merchandising displays, museums took on the unappealing appearance of cultural warehouses. Since the 1950s, heroic efforts have been made to return excitement to American museum going through dramatic settings, famous attractions, and vigorous self-promotion: all feeding an increased public appetite for nostalgic artifacts.

But ever-increasing museum attendance figures have brought problems as well. Museum exhibits are now scrutinized more closely by various groups who wish to have their own social claims supported. Rather than simply being conservators of tradition, museums are being asked to abet the subversion of old authorities. Further muddying these murky waters are questions about ownership of historical artifacts and of their proper display, about criteria for inclusion (or, more properly, for exclusion, now that the canon has expanded), and about the distressing spiral of costs. To meet these threats to survival Harris advises museum administrators to pursue a course of institutional advocacy, a role traditionally eschewed as compromising integrity.

But Harris is not suggesting a glib politicization of our cultural institutions. To the contrary, his is an essentially apolitical temper. In "Cultural Institutions and American Modernization," Harris challenges conventional wisdom among social historians and in so doing reveals the values informing his own writings. Recent historians tend to interpret the creation of American institutions—from prisons to public schools—as a modernizing elite's

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means of social control, dismissing the language of uplift as rhetorical camouflage. But Harris sees the founders of museums, libraries, and other institutions as having undertaken the daunting task of maintaining traditional values in a radically new social environment. Where revisionists see only coercive power at work and fail to ask the hard question about alternatives, Harris perceives "complexity and surprise, ambition and anxiety" in the work of institution builders. He resists easy judgments, calling instead for historians to "cast off formulas that made some ends seem more or less democratic or enfranchising." "We must see the creation of these institutions," he writes, "as responses to a world grown surprising, bewildering, and disintegrating. In so doing, we can avoid a new Manicheanism, which threatens an exciting moment of historical research."

Harris makes assorted forays into popular culture, sometimes utilizing fiction as his window into American consciousness. The flourishing utopian and science-fiction literature of the later nineteenth century revealed on one level an excitement about technology's promise but on another served as an index of prevailing social fears. Likewise, the novelistic treatment of middle-class consumerism by such writers as James, Howells, Dreiser, and Lewis is seen by Harris to encompass a cultural debate about the opportunities and dangers accompanying mass production.

Of all the odd cultural corners Neil Harris has swept, none is more unusual than his discussion of the copyright struggle over America's mythic hero Superman. Harris teases from the comics a case study in cultural contradiction. On the one hand, copyright law increasingly extended commercial protection to creators of fictional figures. But, on the other hand, there was the time-honored freedom to parody anything and anybody. At what point did burlesques of Superman and other protected products cross the boundary into copyright infringement? An increasingly permissive court encouraged incessant lampooning of mythic heroes in the entertainment media, to the point that our culture now has difficulty dealing with any larger-than-life figure in a serious way. "Modern myths," Harris concludes, "seem most easily adaptable to rituals of degradation. The superhero confronts a series of diminutions."

Cultural Excursions's final set of essays illuminates an impressive array of the visual arts: architecture, book illustration, photographic reproduction, color, and modern corporate art patronage. These essays illustrate Harris's particular strengths as cultural observer.

"Iconography and Intellectual History: The Halftone Effect" exemplifies Harris's attempts to bring into the historical mainstream matters generally left to specialists. Intellectual historians, for example, attuned to the written word, have often neglected iconographic evidence. But the coming of mass photographic reproduction through the halftone process, Harris argues, represented a change in social consciousness of the first order, deserving scholarly attention. The photograph's greater persuasiveness revolutionized news reporting, encouraged the cult of celebrity, raised anew the issue of privacy, and stirred a larger debate over the merits of mass culture.

Harris moves from the significance of the photograph to the introduction of color in printing, film, and television. Here, as in his discussions of the halftone and copyright law, Harris's comments are marked by an uncommon willingness to master the technical points of a subject; he consistently shows an impressive familiarity with the specialized primary and secondary sources. Thus his readers learn about the problems of early Technicolor and the battle between NBC and CBS over rival color systems.

For all of their obvious intelligence and ingenuity, do the essays in *Cultural Excursions* provide any general conclusions about American culture over the past century? Harris resists ambitious generalizations, believing "a good question can be more valuable than a good answer." But I would suggest two conclusions.

The first point may be obvious but bears repeating: namely, the interrelatedness of culture. A trademark of all Neil Harris's scholarship has been the search for unities among seemingly unrelated cultural objects, practices, and beliefs. Usually he is convincing, as in his grouping of snapshots, postcards, illustrated periodicals, comics, and motion pictures as part of the challenge of pictorialism to the authority of the written word early in this century. Occasionally, his attempts lack per-

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suasiveness, as in his strained interpretation of the parking garage's significance for our age. Still, better than any recent American cultural historian (save the late Warren Susman) Harris has demonstrated the value of a holistic approach to culture.

Second, the essays portray well America's crab-like walk into modernity. Our great international fairs, museums and libraries, architecture, popular literature, merchandising—each displayed curious mixtures of old and new, of confidence and anxiety, of the need for new categories of interpretation. It is of course a truism that societies both embrace change and fear it. But Harris uncovers this duality in unexpected places and with an ear finely tuned to both expressed and implied levels of cultural debate.

Warburgia

CASSIRER, PANOFSKY, AND WARBURG: SYMBOL, ART, AND HISTORY. *By Silvia Ferretti. Translated by Richard Pierce. $33.*

Reviewed by CARL LANDAUER

Toward the beginning of this century, the art historian Aby Warburg developed a large library in his home in residential Hamburg filled with books on Renaissance art and magic, the history of religion and the classical tradition. Convinced of the organic nature of human culture, Warburg structured his library as a long labyrinth that began with books on the psychology of the symbol and moved through a series of cultural realms. In many ways heir to the medieval encyclopedia, the library, now housed in Woburn Square in London, developed during the short life of the Weimar Republic into an important intellectual center. Associated with the newly founded University of Hamburg, it became the collecting point for important scholars, notably the philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the art historian Erwin Panofsky, and an incubator for scholars who would later become eminent, such as Edgar Wind and H. W. Janson, William Heckscher and Bruno Snell.

These names and those of scholars engaged in the life of the Warburg Institute in its English incarnation, such as the art historian Ernst Gombrich and the scholar of the gnostic tradition Frances Yates, produce strong associations for many scholars now working in the humanities. Art historians automatically associate the Warburg with iconology, the style of art history that reads cultural and philosophical significance into works of art. Others might single out the related tracing of certain images through their historical variations, art history along the lines of Panofsky's study of "blind cupid" in *Studies in Iconology*. Still others, especially historians of the Renaissance, will emphasize the Warburgian preoccupation with Neoplatonism, whether in one of Panofsky's early essays or Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*. Then there is the related fascination with magic and the occult that culminated with Frances Yates and D. P. Walker, not to mention the deeply impressed stylistic idiosyncrasies, such as the short essays structured like compact mystery stories perfected by Panofsky and Heckscher, the marked playfulness one finds in many of Edgar Wind's gem-like essays or in Panofsky's essays devoted to the Rolls Royce grill or the mouse that Michelangelo failed to carve, and the general fondness for the arcane within the context of cross-disciplinary analysis.

These associations, listed seriatim, may produce a rather superficial picture of Warburgian scholarship, and they may inadequately reflect the central theoretical and methodological commitments of the scholars in the tradition founded by Aby Warburg. But it is difficult without such an evocation to reproduce the texture and the feeling of the work emerging from the Bibliothek Warburg. With the apotheosis of "theory" in the humanities over the last two decades, many recent discussions of individual Warburgian scholars have emphasized their theoretical innovations and how they address our present theoretical concerns. Thus, John M. Krois in his book on Cassirer compares Cassirer on technology to Marcuse, Adorno, and Heidegger, and Michael Ann Holly's study of Panofsky focuses on Panofsky's early theoretical essays and introduces Foucault into its final pages. One can even find German essays on Walter

✪ CARL LANDAUER, who taught history at Stanford and McGill universities, is an attorney in San Francisco.

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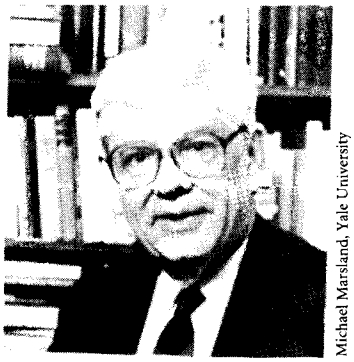

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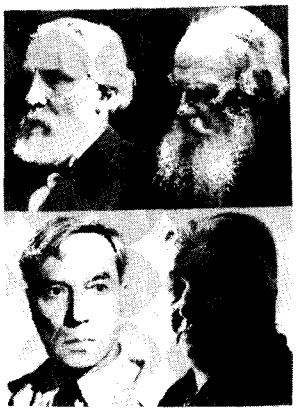

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Benjamin and the Warburg. In this context, Silvia Ferretti's book, recently translated as *Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg: Symbol, Art, and History*, represents perhaps an extreme example of the exclusively theoretical appreciation of Warburgian scholarship.

In her introduction, Ferretti explains her emphasis "on the difference between a concept of history understood as progress . . . and a concept of history understood as a totality of documents whose meaning is to be found only by tracking their basic unity, which in itself is of a nontemporal nature." Oddly missing is the history of concreteness and detail that held such significance for Warburg and his associates. As important as the concrete historical was to them, indeed essential to many of their theoretical innovations, Ferretti's images of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky reside almost entirely in the realm of abstraction, having little time for the historical personages Warburg identified in wax votive figures in Florence, his exact tracing of particular astrological texts and ideas, or even the mouse that Michelangelo failed to carve.

Ferretti begins her book by citing a letter written by Fritz Saxl—the director of the Bibliothek Warburg both during Warburg's stay at the Kreuzlingen Sanatorium and after his death—in which Saxl expressed his appreciation for Ernst Kantorowicz's book on Frederick II primarily because of Kantorowicz's effort at providing a representation of historical material from, as Ferretti puts it, "a single point of view." Ferretti uses this letter to launch into a discussion of what she sees as the central project of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky. But despite her confidence that there is a central project, Ferretti offers a cascading set of formulations that play off such names as Hegel, Burckhardt, and Gombrich. Perhaps the most satisfying of her formulations is the vaguest: "The connection between symbol, image, and creative imagination, on the one hand, and historical time and the unfolding of meanings, on the other, has been viewed as the motif that draws these three scholars together, for each constructed his view of history and historiographic approach on this fundamental theme." Indeed, one finds in Warburg's various lectures, Panofsky's iconological studies, and Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms an interplay of the creative imagination and historical time, symbol, and history. But each of the three scholars has such an overlay of scholarly agendas, both cultural and methodological, and shifting preoccupations that it would be at best an artificial constraint to identify in their work a single "theme."

On certain levels, Ferretti is well aware of the complexity of such figures as Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky. But she nevertheless forces an artificial unity on the work of the three. "One might say," she writes, "that the method Warburg employed in his research took on particular importance in the different philosophical approach given to it by Cassirer (who was immediately and instinctively won over by it), and that the method was expanded theoretically by the research with which Panofsky demonstrated his great intellectual gifts and which laid the foundation for his iconological method of dealing with art-historical problems." Despite her constant insistence on the "profound theoretical difference between Warburg and Cassirer," Ferretti assures us that the "fundamental difference in [their] historical-theoretical formulation was resolved by the common objectives of their research, the kinship of their goals."

Symptomatic of Ferretti's attempt to unify the Warburgian project is the way she begins her chapter on Aby Warburg with Ernst Cassirer's talk at Warburg's memorial service in 1929, and she draws from Cassirer's words to produce a picture of intimacy between Warburg and Cassirer. Similarly, Ferretti places "particular importance" on Cassirer's *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, which appeared as one of the "Studies" of the Bibliothek Warburg and was dedicated to the library's founder. Not surprisingly, of all of Cassirer's works, this book on the Renaissance intersected most with Warburg's interests. Nevertheless, even this book remained very much bound up with Cassirer's own long-term concerns, and must be read within the context of his work both before and after his association with the Warburg—despite the fact that in Ferretti's study "all references to his important philosophical works written before the 1920s, as well as the works written after the early 1930s, have been deliberately omitted."

Yet, if one only looks ahead to Cassirer's *Essay on Man*—often considered an English-language abstract of his great multi-volume

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work of the 1920s, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*—one finds a chapter on art in which neither Warburg's nor Panofsky's name appears, not even in the footnotes. Similarly, Cassirer's connection with the Bibliothek Warburg must be understood in light of a complaint Fritz Saxl once scribbled in a diary kept by the staff of the library—that Cassirer had seldom appeared in the library over the previous year. And despite Ferretti's conviction that Cassirer's work was immensely important to Warburg, the few times that Warburg happens to mention Cassirer's name in lecture notes, he conveys very little sense that he really understood much of Cassirer's philosophy. He tends to use Cassirer's famous formulation, "symbolic forms," as little more than a catchphrase.

What is fascinating about Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky is not so much their attention to a single theme, their attempt to answer a single scholarly question, but the multitude of themes and preoccupations that appear in different forms in their work, molded in part by their radically different sensibilities. Why, for instance, was Neoplatonism so important for Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky—along with other Warburgian scholars—although it took on for each a different cast? Why do magic and the occult assume so prominent a place in their work, and yet have varying connotations? Instead of varying efforts to answer a single problem about symbols and historical change, the writings of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky resemble a kaleidoscopic interchange of fascinations with specific historical materials, a range of methodological concerns, and even a variety of shared aesthetic commitments.

In her introduction, Silvia Ferretti states that her figure of Warburg "does not emerge prominently and immediately, but rather through stage setting so to speak, that partly describes the late nineteenth-century German scene through which he passed and which impressed certain lifelong models upon him." But stage setting is exactly what Ferretti's book most lacks. She provides, for example, little sense of the importance of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky's Jewishness to their work, which may have given them a particular attachment to the thinkers German Jewish scholars so often associated with Jewish emancipation in Germany—the Weimar classicists, such as Goethe and Schiller. Although Ferretti shows immense interest in Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky's grappling with certain German philosophers and aestheticians, a few historians, such as Burckhardt and Usener, and a few classical figures—chiefly, Plato and Aristotle—she does not place the Warburgian scholars in the context of trends in European scholarship at the beginning of this century. Despite the significance of myth to her three subjects, Ferretti never mentions James Frazer's *Golden Bough* or Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. Despite the centrality of the Renaissance to Warburgian scholarship, she shows little interest in the development of Renaissance studies, such as the place of Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* or the struggle between Renaissance scholars and medievalists. She shows little interest in the influence of disciplinary history; despite giving a lot of space to Panofsky's early theoretical essays, she does not place them in the context of a formative period for the then-young discipline of art history, a period in which its very identity was being formed.

What is important for Ferretti is what may be described as the historical hermeneutics of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky. Thus, Ferretti's Panofsky quotes from Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* in "regard to the violence of interpretation." Ferretti's Warburg and Cassirer, despite some variation in their intellectual commitments, seem to arrive at historical and theoretical problems at the same level of abstraction. Ferretti's study shows immense facility with the theoretical intertwinings of Warburgian thought with important theoretical strains of philosophy and the study of culture. Her handling, for example, of Warburg and Burckhardt, Cassirer and Hegel, and Panofsky and Kant is masterful. But, in the end, her three protagonists in these pages are bound by a selection of intellectual problems she deems more significant than they would have. Her book seeks to assert the importance of Warburgian thought by assuring the relevance of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky to some of the intellectual preoccupations of the moment.

It may be natural to attempt to locate the significance of individuals so important to the development of the humanities in their proximity to our contemporary intellectual con-

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cerns. But Ferretti's three Warburgians seem to live almost entirely in the Republic of Letters. Thus, it is not important for her portrait of Panofsky that he was the towering figure of iconology in America, a symbol of the dominant art historical methodology of the 1950s and 1960s, and consequently the target of the young Turks of the art historical profession. Nor is it important that in Germany it is exactly the young Turks who have made Warburg into a hero symbolizing their opposition to the post-war formalism of German art history. It is important to assess the meaning of Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky's work in the context of their own cultural and academic setting; and it is important to decipher the ways in which their work was translated by later academic generations. These crucial matters, unfortunately, are not of interest to Ferretti.

A Good European

PAUL CELAN: A BIOGRAPHY OF HIS YOUTH. *By Israel Chalfen. Translated by Maximilian Bleyleben, with an introduction by John Felstiner. Persea Books. $24.95.*

Reviewed by ALAN RUTENBERG

Shortly after Paul Celan's death in Paris in 1970, his widow announced to the Romanian poet Nina Cassian that she wished Celan to be associated with "neither the Romanian nor the Jewish ghetto." It is a just and civilized wish, since Celan did not permit himself "hearty fatherlandishness, a plop and relapse into old loves and narrownesses . . . hours of national agitations, patriotic palpitations, and various other sorts of archaizing sentimental inundations." This, of course, is Nietzsche's description of the temptations not permitted the good European. And Paul Celan, born in 1920 in Czernowitz, the provincial capital of Romanian Bukovina, whom competent critics place as one of the most significant German poets of this century, was most distinctly, in both his life and work, a good European. Despite the death of his Jewish parents in German internment camps, despite his own forced servitude in Romanian labor camps, Celan insisted on writing poetry in German, on placing himself in the German literary tradition of Hölderlin and Rilke, on becoming a student of Jewish and Christian theology and a serious reader of Martin Heidegger, his contemporary. He spent most of his life after the Second World War in Paris, as a lecturer on German literature, as a translator of French, Russian, and English poetry, and as the author of nine volumes of German poetry.

Unfortunately, Paul Celan remains the subject of numerous parochial interpretations and enthusiasms. For German and Romanian and Jewish history, for French deconstruction and German hermeneutics, and for the French and German debates on the politics of Heidegger, Celan is an emblematic figure, still difficult and undocumented enough to be available for much use and abuse.

Israel Chalfen's biography of the poet's youth, originally published in Germany in 1979 and based largely on interviews with men and women from Czernowitz who knew Celan, is an honorable first attempt to provide an adequate historical record. Chalfen himself is from Bukovina, which Celan described as "a region inhabited by people and books," and the biography displays an understandable sentimentality toward Celan and toward this former province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While that sentimentality places an emphasis on geographical and religious origins, the effect of the accumulated evidence is to stress the foundation of Celan's extraordinary fidelity to the German language. Chalfen quotes Celan: "Only in one's mother tongue can one express one's own truth; in a foreign language the poet lies."

For Celan, German was literally, explicitly, his mother tongue. An only child, Celan grew up in a strict bourgeois household. With his mother he associated German literature, cosmopolitan refinement, an amiable maternal kindness, and, above all, the German language; with his father, commerce, religious education and Zionism, and discipline. Chalfen reports of his mother, "All her life she saw to it that correct, formal German was spoken at home—she did not tolerate the colloquial Bukovinian dialect." As a student "she especially enjoyed reading the German classics, and in later years she would compete with her

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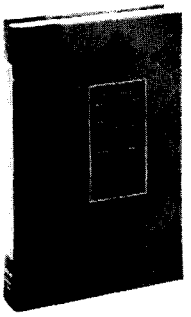

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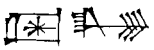

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son Paul in quoting their favorite authors from memory." This cultivation had a social dimension as well, and it informed the aspirations of both parents: "Paul was to enter the city's best social circles, keep his German mother tongue as pure as possible, take up an intellectual job, and live in honor and prosperity."

His preparatory education followed from these expectations, with exceptions for a Zionist elementary school and Hebrew tutorials, according to the preferences of his father, and the choice of the liberal Ukrainian upper gymnasium, determined by increasing anti-Semitism in the elite but nationalist Romanian state institution, where Celan had completed the lower gymnasium course. Along with his mastery of German, Celan excelled in his studies of Romanian and later of French, both of which influenced the poetry he wrote in his adolescence. A precocious linguist, young Paul: "If Corneille and Racine were being studied, he was already reading Verlaine and Rimbaud; and if the class was still working on Schiller and Goethe, he had already reached Hölderlin and Rilke." According to Chalfen, Celan's enthusiasm for poetry, theater, and languages reflected the idealization of his mother, while his involvement with anti-Fascist groups of the Left distanced him from his father's strict discipline and Zionist ideals.

In 1938, in agreement with his parents' expectations, Celan went to France for premedical courses at Tours. After a year, he returned home—the war precluding further medical studies—and enrolled in a program of Romance philology at the local university in Czernowitz. In 1940, Soviet troops occupied the city, but during that period Celan was able to continue his studies and to learn Russian.

In 1941 Germans and Romanians occupied Czernowitz and initiated a series of deportations of Jews to internment camps in Ukrainian Transnistria. In the summer of 1942, Celan's parents, who had refused an opportunity to hide, were deported and shot. Celan survived because of his conscription into a Romanian forced-labor detachment, in which he remained until the Soviet army returned in February 1944. He soon resumed his studies, this time in English. "He wanted to perfect his knowledge of English and especially of Shakespeare's language," writes Mr. Chalfen. Celan remained in Czernowitz until April 1945, when he left for Bucharest. There he encountered Romanian poets interested in surrealism, and he worked as a publisher's reader and translator of Russian texts into Romanian. In 1947 he escaped Bucharest for the Vienna of his youthful imagination; disillusioned, six months later he emigrated to Paris to continue his philological studies—in German.

Here Chalfen's biography ends; there is not yet a biography that chronicles Celan's later years. In 1952 Celan married the artist Gisèle Lestrange and then remained in Paris as a lecturer in German literature at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He committed suicide by drowning in the Seine in April 1970.

Celan is a poet of the Holocaust. His poetry mourns the loss of his parents, yet he addresses the Holocaust in the German language, not only as a personal and Jewish catastrophe, but as a catastrophe for German and European civilization. As his poetry develops, it becomes less specifically historical and more private and theological. Death and remembrance remain constant themes, expressed with increasing formal complexity, intellectual ambition, and inwardness of language and thought. This suggests affinities with the English metaphysical poets, whom Celan in fact translated. Yet seventeenth-century poetry is at once complex and transparent, while Celan's work, which he insisted was "absolutely not hermetic," becomes increasingly difficult and opaque.

Celan's most famous poem, the memorial "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue"), appeared in a collection published in 1952, *Mohn und Gedachtnis* (Poppy and Memory). Celan describes the historical scene of his mother's execution through a meditation on figures from German literature and the Hebrew Bible. Margarete, from Goethe's *Faust*, and Shulamith, from the Song of Solomon, become a pair of archetypal figures representing German masters and Jewish victims. These are the final sections of the poem (I quote Michael Hamburger's translations in *Poems of Paul Celan* throughout):

> Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
> we drink you at noon death is a master from Germany
> we drink you at sundown and in the morning we drink and we drink you

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death is a master from Germany his eyes are
blue
he strikes you with leaden bullets his aim is true
a man lives in the house your golden hair
Margarete
he sets his pack on to us he grants us a grave in
the air
he plays with the serpents and daydreams death
is a master from Germany

your golden hair Margarete
your ashen hair Shulamith

The poem became canonical in post-war Germany as part of the national enterprise of civic and moral reconstruction; it is, for example, quite prominent in the iconography of the German artist Anselm Kiefer. Celan later found the poem too direct and explicit, an early work of surrealism not representative of his later poetry.

With his 1959 collection *Sprachgitter (Speech-Grille)*, Celan's poetry changed significantly. The central poem in this collection, "Engführung" ("The Straitening"), is Celan's own revision of "Todesfuge." The title is a term employed in the composition of fugues; in everyday use, it refers to the process of narrowing down, of reduction. Repeating "Todesfuge," "Engführung" includes a scene of execution; but the historical, representational descriptions of the earlier poem are accompanied here by the counterpoint of religious language and a new, theological frame of reference. In terms that respond to Hölderlin's "Patmos," a meditation on the withdrawal of divine presence from the world, Celan acknowledges the continued presence of a temple and stars, a choir and psalms, in these extreme circumstances. The eighth of nine sections reads:

At owl's flight, near
the petrified scabs,
near
our fled hands, in
the latest rejection,
above
the rifle-range near
the buried wall:

visible, once
more: the
grooves, the
choirs at that time, the
psalms. Ho, ho-
sanna.

So
there are temples yet. A
star
probably still has light.
Nothing,
Nothing is lost.

Ho-
sanna.

At owl's flight here,
the conversations, day-grey,
of the water-level traces.

In "Tenebrae," from the same collection, Celan interprets history through the religious symbolism of the Crucifixion. *Tenebrae* is the name of a Roman Catholic Holy Week service; candles lighted at the beginning of the service are extinguished one by one after the recitation of each psalm, in memory of the darkness at the time of the Crucifixion. The poem is constructed as a series of psalms recited in a Tenebrae service that identifies the Holocaust and the Crucifixion. It begins:

We are near, Lord,
near and at hand.

Handled already, Lord,
clawing and clawing as though
the body of each of us were
your body, Lord.

Pray, Lord,
pray to us,
we are near.

Celan's next collection, *Niemandsrose* (No One's Rose), from 1963, is a cycle of poems dedicated to Osip Mandelstam, another poet who makes complex use of both Jewish and Christian sources. "Psalm," the major poem in this collection and an important example of Celan's religious poetry, echoes the language and imagery of Genesis and the Book of Psalms in the Bible and the rhetoric of presence and absence found in both Jewish and Christian mysticism. In "Psalm," as in "Tenebrae," Celan employs specific religious conventions in order to transform the ordinary

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language and statements of prayer into an allusive and erudite language of poetry. These are the first two sections of "Psalm":

No one moulds us again out of earth and clay,
no one conjures our dust.
No one.
Praised be your name, no one.
For your sake
we shall flower.
Towards
you.

Between 1958 and 1964, the period of his central poetry, Celan was prolific as a translator of a series of large and difficult works by Mandelstam, Blok, and Esenin; Rimbaud and Valéry; and Shakespeare. The Mandelstam volume, the first German translation of his poetry, contains a handsome introduction by Celan, which, in spirit, reveals a self-portrait:

The intellectual context of Mandelstam's writing, its Russian, but also Jewish, Greek and Latin heritage, its religious and philosophical thought, is still largely unexplored. (Regarding him, as is commonly done, as one of the "Acmeists," shows only one aspect of his altogether unusual work.)

With his next collection, *Atemwende* (Breath-turning), published in 1967, Celan's poetry, written under the influence of Heidegger, became extremely difficult and inward. Various critics have proposed that through his translations Celan had made available for his poetry a strange or cleansed or purified German language. Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote that this poetry might be accessible in a thousand years. One of the notable events of Celan's last years was his pilgrimage to Todtnauberg to meet Martin Heidegger; the meeting never took place, but the episode has become a part of the debate about Heidegger's politics. George Steiner, who has championed Celan as a major figure, has speculated that Heidegger's charged failure to meet Celan may have contributed to his decline into mental illness. Celan was a serious reader of Heidegger, both of *Being and Time* and of the essays on poetry and Hölderlin, and Celan's late poems do reflect Heidegger's influence, especially his proposition that it is not so much the poet who speaks, but language itself; in Celan's words from a representative late poem, "Fadensonnen" (Thread Suns), language speaks "on the other side of mankind." Here is the complete poem from *Atemwende*:

THREAD SUNS
above the grey-black wilderness.
a true-
high thought
tunes in to light's pitch: there are
still songs to be sung on the other side
of mankind.

In her introduction to Celan's *Last Poems*, Katharine Washburn reaches this by-now almost standard conclusion: "Adorno claimed, in a remark too often cited, that after the barbarism of Auschwitz, there could be no more poems. Celan's work has refuted that claim while stealthily supplanting it with another, to which there is still no adequate reply: after Celan's poems . . . what new explorations can be made?"

Czeslaw Milosz provides a kind of reply, and one of Milosz's best critics, the English poet Donald Davie, scrupulously compresses the matter. He asserts that for Milosz, "when all is said and done, the World War II experience of eastern Europe, not excluding the appalling experience of East European Jewry, does *not* compel us to conceive of the office of poetry in some unprecedented, disillusioned, and peculiarly exacting way."

Milosz witnessed the Nazi occupation of Poland, the Soviet seizure of Lithuania in 1940, and the Warsaw rising of 1944. His experiences did compel serious reappraisal of the office of poetry, and the fruit of that long reappraisal, writes Davie, "is a re-assertion and vindication of the artist's office as traditionally conceived, 'classical' as Milosz uses that term—that is to say, as mediated to us from the world of the ancients through the Renaissance."

Milosz's 1959 poem, "Counsels," begins with this stanza of Renaissance echoes, from Calderón and Shakespeare:

If I were in the place of young poets
(quite a place, whatever the generation might think)
I would prefer not to say that the earth is a madman's dream,
a stupid tale full of sound and fury.

—translated by Czeslaw Milosz

Celan's vexed conception of the office of

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poetry required him to write in German, to remain in Paris, and to conduct his career, not as an emblematic figure, but as a difficult poet of the highest, most serious ambition. These are the honorable, costly commitments of a good European; they are central to Celan's singular achievement.

Brave New Words

AMERICAN FICTION IN THE COLD WAR. *By Thomas Hill Schaub. University of Wisconsin Press. $35. Paper, $12.95.*

Reviewed by PAUL BAUER

With the dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe and the astonishing, albeit incomplete rejection of socialist utopianism for the freedoms and vicissitudes of the marketplace by the people of the former Soviet Union, the time perhaps has come for conscientious Americans to turn their critical eyes to the last bastion of these discredited ideologies—the American academy. Consider this a report from the trenches regarding one small battleground of the front, a Belleau Wood that goes under the name of contemporary literary criticism. Sometimes minutiae can tell a tale: an otherwise unremarkable book published by a university press, Thomas Hill Schaub's new book, *American Fiction in the Cold War*, provides an instructive, harrowing glimpse of the captive minds populating modern English departments.

To understand what Schaub has to say about American novels of the forties and fifties, you first have to understand how academic liberals define the Cold War. To a literary critic trained under graduate-school regimes of the last twenty-five years or so, the Cold War represents either a bizarre fantasy of the American Right, a concoction of paranoids, or else a conspiracy. In the academic lexicon, "anti-communism" is either a disease, a sign of a warped mind overreacting to the Soviet threat, or a calculated "ideological screen" rationalizing massive, unnecessary defense

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spending and reactionary domestic agendas. That this picture realistically depicts the academic landscape should be obvious to anyone who has walked down the hallways of a college English department with his ears and eyes open—in these brave new worlds, no one lifts a brow if someone is described as a Marxist, but to be branded a conservative is akin to being called a leper; in these intellectual labor camps, no one reads Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, but everyone reads Frederic Jameson.

Professor Schaub's book does offer admirably synthetic interpretations of a number of important works, if such hermeneutic vivisection is to your taste; it does "place" novelists in suggestive historical and political contexts; and it is even written in a style that, though replete with academic jargon, is relatively less burdened by it than most works of contemporary literary criticism emanating from university presses. But because Schaub proceeds from the assumptions of his "interpretive community" regarding the Cold War, he sees only what he is programmed to see. Thus, in his readings, American novels written in the decade after World War II consistently reflect what he calls "the liberal narrative," defined as the rejection of political utopianism by radicals of the thirties chastened by the evidence of Stalinist terror and oppression; for the writers he reads, this rejection is often couched in the opposition of youthful idealism and mature realism. But where a more independent cultural historian might simply say that such a narrative reflects the actual experience of world politics in the turbulent middle decades of the century—admitting, in other words, that Stalinism was a horrific enterprise and that such honest intellectuals as Sidney Hook or Lionel Trilling might regret ever having given it aid and comfort—for Schaub, currently a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and before that at the University of California at Berkeley, such a narrative is surreal, manufactured, a "lesser-order cultural myth."

Throughout his book, in fact, Schaub utilizes the jargon of deconstruction to identify the "binary assumptions," "elemental structures," "dominant tropes," and "typical polarities" of Cold War writers as if the polarities of totalitarianism versus freedom and communism versus democracy were merely rhetorical ploys in a language game designed to rationalize failures of nerve by inadequately "committed" leftist intellectuals and not realities spelled out in the blood of millions. "Thus we are quick to point out," he writes, "that the postwar derogation of ideology—condemned as a simplification of social and political reality—was itself an ideology that served to reinforce the dominant cold war polarities which privileged American democracy, imagined as a fruitful tension of conflicting groups in contrast with the monolithic repressiveness of the Soviet Union." Here both the virtues of democracy and the vices of communism are "imagined"; the battle for freedom that we hope now to have won becomes an illusion, a trick of rhetoric. The Ukrainian terror famine, the Great Purge, the Katyn Forest massacre, the Gulag, the KGB, Soviet tanks rolling into Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan—none ever existed, he implies, outside the feverish discourse of anticommunism, and none receives mention in his text.

Instead, one gets a series of extended readings of novels by such writers of the post-war era as Ralph Ellison, Flannery O'Connor, Norman Mailer, and John Barth, readings that are dedicated to ferreting out the paralyzing "liberal narrative" lurking just beneath the surface of otherwise diverse books. Schaub now becomes the interrogator, tripping up the novelists he studies by exposing the apostasies of "moral ahistoricism," anti-communism, "general euphoric Americanism," or, worst of all, veiled conservatism embedded in their stories. The inquisitorial tone of his discussion of Ellison's *Invisible Man* typifies the argument as a whole: Ellison's writing here becomes "indistinguishable from the centrist discourse"; his view of the individual as artist is too "Eurocentric"; his view of art itself as anti-ideological "seems at once naive and reactionary"; his view of conflict as a "tragic and eternal fact of human existence . . . threatens to predicate a mythic vision instead of political action."

This sense of a novelist such as Ellison "threatening" to preclude political action by reference to universals of human nature speaks volumes about the academic canons of literary value operating in Schaub's book: whatever his other virtues (whether of plot, characterization, depth of observation, or lan-

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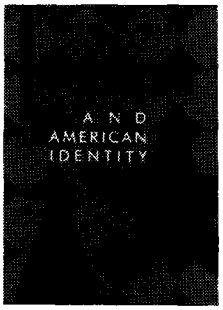
guage), the novelist lays himself open to devastating charges of deviationism whenever he refuses to acknowledge the historically determinant categories of race, class, and gender—the categories that authorize the divisive politics of victimization now dominant on American campuses. Thus, in his discussion of Mailer's essay on the hipster, "The White Negro," Schaub identifies the moments in Mailer's text where he seems disinclined to "think in terms of class or collective action" or where "his explanatory model has little to do with socioeconomic status," and announces that he has discovered "latent conservatism" in Mailer's writing, the point at which it becomes "the language of capital acquisition rather than socialist redistribution." If the idea of Mailer as a closet conservative strikes you as passing strange, remember that in the never-never land of academia even *liberal* is a pejorative, describing those intellectuals who suffer the sad fate of what Schaub calls "deradicalization." This is not literary criticism—it's a show trial.

There are certainly other elements of Schaub's book that should also give one pause. His book reaffirms the academic community's massive biases against Christianity, particularly in his critical discussions of the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr that were so influential in the Cold War years, writings he attacks as being too deeply committed to "ideas of human depravity and inherent limitation in the ability of men and women to control history." That a sense of inherent depravity might be a realistic viewpoint after Auschwitz or a sense of limits salutary in an age of Five-Year Plans and forced collectivization, that a return to faith might seem warranted in a century characterized by unimaginable violence, are untenable conclusions in the academic universe Schaub inhabits. More evident are the sops he throws to the political-correctness mob—for example, when he writes that "much of the most interesting writing of the forties, fifties and sixties was written by blacks, Jews, women, members of the drug world, and disaffected youth. For these writers the 'age of conformity' was a middle-class illusion, smugly indifferent." So much for John P. Marquand, James Gould Cozzens, or John O'Hara, massively popular and respected writers of the forties and fifties whose works offer subtle descriptions of the

LIBERALISM AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

Patrick M. Garry



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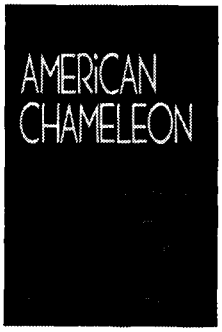
Individualism in Trans-National Context

Richard O. Curry and Lawrence B. Goodheart, eds.



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diversity within middle-class experience. But they are writers afflicted with the unfortunate temerity to be mature white males happily disabused of the political romanticism that became fashionable among chic literati of the sixties; none of these unfashionable writers, of course, is mentioned in Schaub's work, while writers of the Left's anarchist fringe, such as Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, receive extensive commentary.

Running through Schaub's book and dominating my attention was the author's consistent insinuation, so typical of the academic Left, that the Cold War was less a battle for freedom than a chimera of deluded minds, a fantasy or, in the most persistent and pernicious formulation, a form of hysteria not unlike the witchcraft trials of seventeenth-century Salem. That image of the Cold War era was popularized by Arthur Miller's famous liberal passion play, *The Crucible*, a work Schaub quotes approvingly on his first page. An assumption so massively wrongheaded, so utterly disproven by facts long before perestroika, long before Tiananmen Square, and long before the astonishing events of August 1991, so astonishingly ignorant of the realities of history even as it pronounces itself opposed to "moral ahistoricism"—this image is a sign of just how deeply entrenched the Left is in the groves of academe.

Can the situation be changed? I doubt it: there is a certain brand of academic intellectual who will always prefer to erect theories rather than respond to facts by changing his or her opinion. How American academics will ultimately respond to the events of the past three years in Eastern Europe, China, and the Soviet Union is all too predictable—rationalization, modification, redefinition, anything to avoid having to set aside basic, cherished assumptions. One might wish at least for signs of academics making a start toward a revisionist history of the Cold War, one in which anticommunism would be seen, not as a hallucination of the Right but as a moral triumph of American will of at least the magnitude of the contemporaneous civil rights movement. One might wish more generally that lessons would be learned about the dangers of immense government structures and the dignity of the individual, about the limitations of rational planning and the human meaning of economic freedom, and ultimately about the weaknesses and strengths, the sins and virtues of real men and real women. But given the ingrained biases against historical fact exhibited unwittingly by such academics as Professor Schaub, it is probably too much to expect. What we fall back on is the somewhat satisfying, somewhat sad awareness that neither their students nor the American public pays them much attention.

How Do We Know

CAN'T WE MAKE MORAL JUDGEMENTS? *By Mary Midgley. St. Martin's Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by GORDON MARINO

The intentions behind this slim but thickly argued volume are moral and therapeutic. In Professor Midgley's opinion the post-modern individual (to use a phrase she abhors) suffers from "certain highly confusing doubts about the possibility of thinking morally." These doubts erode confidence in our capacity to think about matters moral. According to Professor Midgley's vision, however, moral thinking is an essential feature of the moral life; thus, the doubts and diffidence are, morally speaking, serious business. A true, though not necessarily avowed, practitioner of ye old analytic philosophical method, Professor Midgley believes that with a little bit of clarification she can dispel our doubts and restore the once-addled reader's potential for moral thinking, and so for moral living.

On Professor Midgley's reading, and just about everyone else's, the present age is one that places a lunatic emphasis on individual freedom. For Westerners, whose ethos is, says Midgley, largely determined by America, the notion of freedom does not ring with associations of self-government. The ideal is, rather, one of being left alone, and its peculiar slant does not derive from an inherent dread of community but from a profound skepticism about morals. In what may be a mild exaggeration, Professor Midgley claims that most people see themselves as too ignorant about mor-

✪ GORDON MARINO, who teaches part-time at Harvard, is finishing a book on Søren Kierkegaard.

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als to interfere in other people's lives. Once convinced that our views on human excellence are, at best, matters of opinion and that a knowledge of good and evil is forbidden to us, "freedom . . . becomes the supreme value; it has to be infinite because nobody ever knows enough to be in a position to restrict it." But how did people so arrogant in the assertion of their freedom ever become so diffident about their capacity for moral judgment?

The malefactor in Midgley's brief history of doubt is René Descartes. Descartes had the vaulting ambition to try and set human knowledge on a new foundation, and toward that end he tendered his celebrated strategy of methodical doubt, in accordance with which we are only to count beliefs that cannot be doubted as knowledge. The fantasy, still alive in some philosophical quarters, was that the certainty attaching to our indubitable ideas could be pumped along to others deduced from these foundational truths.

Midgley emphasizes—and I think rightfully so—that the Cartesian criterion was infinitely more stringent than the Aristotelian model of knowledge it supplanted. Rigid as it might have been, the new standard gave a fillip to science and as a result caught on and hangs on to the present day. All of this may have been fine for theoretical physics, but with the triumph of the Cartesian conception of knowledge, reasoned beliefs about morals were derogated to a special but then again not-so-special realm of value. In other words, theories about how best to live came to be understood in emotivist terms—as the irrational expressions of brute feelings.

The Cartesian notion that where there is doubt there cannot be knowledge is the demon behind many apostasies of moral reason. Midgley tries to exorcise it with arguments. Standards, be they of knowledge or ice cream, do not exist in a vacuum. They are a human invention, established for a purpose that then becomes, in effect, the standard of the standard. Midgley observes that when the absolute certainty requirement is rigorously applied, Newton turns out to be just as shaky as Kant. Thanks, however, to inventions such as light bulbs, microwaves, and electric can openers, the constant turning and overturning of scientific theories never undermined any-

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one's faith in the ultimate intelligibility of the physical world. In the realm of morals, however, the Cartesian touchstone duped us into thinking that we could not come to possess the knowledge that we already had.

I am not sure that many skeptics will recognize themselves in Professor Midgley's corrective account—that is, that many unbelievers in the possibility of moral knowledge believe themselves to be prisoners of hyperbolic expectations. But for the masses of the diffident the standards are not the problem. What troubles them is the welter of seemingly interminable moral debates. To be sure, there is some moral consensus on many issues, but on a wide range of topics nobody seems to be able to change anyone's mind on anything. Add the project of cross-cultural discussion, wherein we cannot even assume agreement on the value of freedom and the evil of torture, and there is greater cause for throwing up your hands. With some justification, Midgley notes that there have always been apparently insoluble issues. Slavery was one. Universal suffrage another. This reminder may calm a few nerves, but it is not going to unfurrow the brow of the Pyrrhonist to whom this book is addressed. From the outset, it is evident that Midgley is convinced that we can justify our moral judgments. The skeptic demands to know how.

Drawing on the Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle's distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that', Midgley argues that moral knowledge, considered as an understanding of how to act toward others, is more akin to knowing how to do something than it is to propositional knowledge (knowing that). One of the advances of contemporary philosophy has been to show us just how dependent abstract theories are upon pictorial images. To put it in Professor Midgley's pictures, the knowledge of how to swim is, so to speak, in our muscles. When it comes to knowing the difference between right and wrong, however, "it might not be so much our muscles that are involved as our large-scale cognitive and practical attitudes—our whole policies for thinking and living."

There are, I think, a number of false analogies between knowing how to swim and how to act morally. Most important of them all, one only needs to jump into a pool to find out whether one's muscles contain a knowledge of the Australian crawl, but how do we know whether or not our moral judgments amount to swimming or sinking? There are different stripes of skepticism, but most unbelievers are what they are because they firmly believe that we cannot justify our moral judgments. Professor Midgley assures us that justification is by no means beyond reach. On her account, a judgment is morally justified when it coheres with the rest of your life and stands up to examination. But unlike swimming, where there is very little question about how to test our knowlege, the standards for deciding what counts as an adequate examination of a moral position are far from clear. Some would claim that the inability to resolve the question of the proper form of such an examination is the strongest reason of all for becoming a skeptic.

But even if we ignore this complaint, those who have lost confidence in the ability to reason about goodness and justice have usually done so because they have taken Professor Midgley's advice, examined their moral views, and concluded that very few of them stand up to scrutiny; or, just as disheartening, they find that in many cases equally powerful arguments can be mustered for conflicting positions. Given Professor Midgley's criterion, two people holding inconsistent moral positions would be equally justified in their beliefs so long as each of their views had been subject to some kind of examination and cohered with the rest of their lives. The suggestion that one person could be as justified supporting the death penalty as someone else is in lobbying against it may not trouble some readers, but neither will it sway the individual who thinks that, in comparison with other fields of human knowledge, our beliefs about ethics simply do not match up.

Midgley's volume is not going to close the book on the doubts it was written to dispel. Still, the analysis has not been entirely in vain. With a degree of certitude that Descartes himself would have appreciated, Mary Midgley fixes one point: like it or not, skeptic or not, one cannot avoid making moral judgments. This being the case, we had better think about our standards for evaluating moral arguments—which is obliquely to say, skeptics should stop pretending to believe that the actions of Jeffrey Dahmer and Mother

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Theresa are on an equally rational footing. Even for a doubting Thomas, or, rather, especially for a doubting Thomas, this well-written piece of counsel makes Professor Midgely's book worth reading.

Jewish Reality

THE MEANING OF JEWISH EXISTENCE: THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS, 1930–1939. *By Alexander Altmann. Edited by Alfred L. Ivry. Translated by Edith Ehrlich and Leonard H. Ehrlich. Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England. $45.*

Reviewed by STEVEN GROSBY

It is generally forgotten that the philosopher and biblical scholar Martin Buber was also editor of *Die Gesellschaft*, that great series of sociological monographs published between 1906 and 1912. Such intellectual breadth and the seriousness usually associated with it were characteristic of the best scholarship in the first part of the twentieth century in Germany, where philosophy, theology, and sociology were strongly and properly connected. Perhaps these intellectual interconnections are the prerequisites necessary for scholars concerned about matters of fundamental importance to human existence. One thinks of such contemporaries of Buber as Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Max Scheler, Franz Rosenzweig, and Gershom Scholem, all of them interested in philosophy, theology, and sociology. Indicative of the pervasiveness of this intellectual breadth and seriousness was that a young orthodox Jewish rabbi, Alexander Altmann, could in 1930 write his doctoral dissertation on the obscure yet profound ideas of the philosopher and sociologist Max Scheler, that scholar who (according to Scholem) had a chameleonlike genealogy. Concern about matters of fundamental importance to human existence, and in particular to Jewish existence, is a fitting description for this impressive collection of the early essays of Alex-

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ander Altmann. The publication of these sixteen essays, including the epilogue on "exile" and "return" written by Altmann in 1977, and the fine introduction to them by Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr are deserving of serious consideration.

Alexander Altmann, perhaps best known for his work on Moses Mendelssohn, was born in 1906 and spent his youth in Austria and Germany. These early essays were written while he lived in Berlin. In 1938 Altmann fled Berlin for Manchester, England, where he became the "Communal Rabbi" of the Jewish community there. He remained in Manchester until 1959 when he left for Brandeis University, where he was professor of Jewish philosophy and the history of ideas. He died in 1987.

The question of paramount and continuing importance that Altmann put forward for consideration is: What is Jewish reality today? This is the question that runs throughout many of these essays. In "Religion and Reality," written in 1933, Altmann repeated Buber's plea that "we must find our way back to the lived everyday Jewish life, to the whole Jewish reality." Altmann continued by observing that "the return to a Jewish reality is a vital necessity for us, we each concretely feel, each of us as we suddenly find ourselves in a situation in which we sense that we are denied our firm points of support in the surrounding reality."

The urgency of this necessity had evidently and rightly become clear to Altmann by 1933. Certainly no support for the German Jews was to be expected from those constitutional theorists and lawyers such as Carl Schmitt, whose long and bitter hatred of liberalism found its expression in Schmitt's embrace of nazism. In 1933, Altmann began his masterful essay "What Is Jewish Theology?" by observing that "the current situation of the Jews in Germany . . . has placed their entire existence, including ultimate spiritual values, under the dictates of the hour, which shake us and demand reflection." In the essay "Franz Rosenzweig's Legacy" (1937), he presented us with "the task of transforming the substance of Jewish theology into modern consciousness"—a task that would "keep us busy for a long time to come." Forty years later, in the epilogue to this collection, Altmann continued the task of exploring those developing "elements of consciousness" that were "the presuppositions of a contemporary Jewish perspective."

It was entirely to Altmann's credit that he rejected two responses to the problem of what constituted Jewish reality today—namely, both the flight from liberalism to a Zionism that was either a purely "nationalistic," "shallow," and "religiously neutral peoplehood," or a "purely religious," "*Kultur*-denying Judaism." He thought that these two diametrically different responses shared, in fact, a confession of spiritual helplessness in the face of the realities of modern life. Altmann realized that both responses were alien to Judaism insofar as, in different ways, they represented retreats from, if not rejections of, an active, "this-worldly" orientation of the Jewish faith.

To Altmann, these two confessions of spiritual helplessness were not "genuine," by which he meant that they were not affirming. They were retreats from what was essential in Judaism—a serious Jewish existence in this world. In his rejection of these two responses, the continuing influence of elements of Scheler's ethics of values may have played a part, despite Altmann's eventual disapproval of what he understood to be Scheler's emotional intuitionism. Altmann demanded that Judaism be an affirmation of life in this world—or, in the terminology of Scheler, that it must convey "higher," "positive" values.

Of course, it was not, nor could it be, an affirmation of life per se; but of a Jewish life—a life properly lived in the world of today. Altmann thought he knew what constituted such a life. As he stated in the essay of 1937, "Are There Dogmas in Judaism?" the "theological concepts such as creation, revelation, redemption, sin, and repentance are no longer taken seriously enough. This applied even to orthodoxy." Yet he refused to retreat into the simplistic and fashionable denunciation of modernity. He recognized that "each age needs its specific theology," and demanded that "we need new formulations." To be sure, Altmann reaffirmed that the law is "the cornerstone of Jewish existence." He rightly insisted on more:

> Judaism is more than law. The law itself needs the religious conception of the world so that, based on it, it can be practiced organically. We lack this

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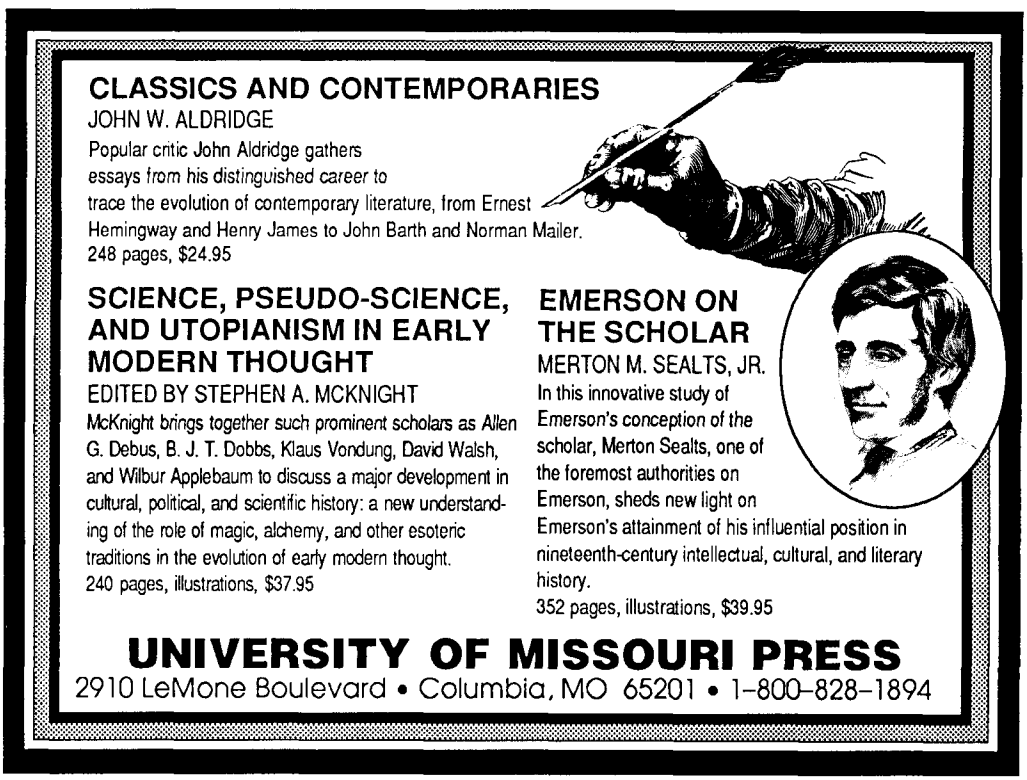
religious conception of the world. . . . We need a genuine Jewish piety, a deep re-rooting in the soil of faith in order to speak a legitimate Jewish word and to be able to confront the diverse problems of the Jewish present. Is there a way?

In answering this question, Altmann forthrightly reasserted the particularism of Judaism by recognizing that not only was the law essential but so, too, the beliefs in the promised land and the chosen people. In the essay "Our Way to Reality" (1937), he observed that, as long as Israel exists in exile, it was mute in the world. Jewish reality required an embrace of "land and Torah as a unity." In "What Is Jewish Theology?" he described the Jewish understanding of existence as a mutual relationship between the concepts of peoplehood and revelation. By justifiably drawing attention to the constitutive importance of the beliefs in the land and the people for Judaism, Altmann clarified his earlier formulation, in "Religion and Reality," that "the God [of Judaism] does not want to be enthroned above reality but wants to linger right in its midst." Whatever historical ambiguity there might have been in the phrase "right in its midst," it was an ambiguity that, in Altmann's view, was no longer to be tolerated. Altmann reaffirmed what was theologically never ambiguous: "the concept of 'congregation' as an institution, as something that completes and endures, is Christian"; while, in contrast, "Judaism is essentially a community of a people." The people of Israel, without their land, were, as Max Weber had also observed, incomplete.

This constitutive expectation of Judaism—that God encounters man in this world—excludes, as Altmann argued in the essay "A Discussion with Dialectical Theology" (1935), that paradoxical relationship between God and man as expressed in Christianity—that is, the relationship of eternal opposition between God and man implied by the doctrine of original sin. In "What Is Jewish Theology?" he observed that the doctrine of original sin necessitated the insertion of "a charismatic salvific institution between God and man."

> The [Catholic] church, as successor to its founder, takes over the function of bestowing grace. With this, however, it enters a situation of permanent crisis. The church necessarily becomes a paradox. It



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wants to be divine and human in one. More so, itclaims to be both sinning humanity and repository of the otherworldly.

This uneasy, paradoxical relationship of opposition between God and man—an opposition embodied in the church—has been stabilized in variously different ways throughout the history of Christianity, as Troeltsch had convincingly shown. Altmann emphasized that in Judaism the escape into a church is impossible. It is the living actual people, and not the church, who are the unmediated bearers of historical revelation. In his view, there is "no dialectic of opposition" that "is able to prevent man's being true to himself" in this world.

Nevertheless, Judaism has also been infused with a paradoxical relationship: Israel is not simply a people, but a people chosen by Yahweh to dwell in a land promised to them by Yahweh. Altmann realized that, as such, Israel is not simply a people within history. The people of Israel exist in and through their covenant with God and his law—thus, a people who also stand above history. There is a tension in this covenantal relationship between God and his people—a people chosen to be judged.

It was precisely this paradoxical relationship between particularity and universality that was so incomparably expressed, albeit uneasily, by the Israelite prophets. By continuing to do so, Judaism contains within itself a truth, the truth of the essentialness of what is its own, of particularity, and, yet, at the same time, the insufficiency of what is its own. Is the history of the ethically more universalistic Christianity, among other things, a history of doctrinal universality having to acknowledge a truth of particularity?

Today, does this paradoxical tension between particularity (the people) and universality (the law) force upon the state of Israel expectations that are intolerable? The problem can not be avoided. All the incessant chatter about the secularization of modern life, about the so-called emptiness of our times, only bears witness to both the deplorable lack of seriousness and the simplicity of thought among intellectuals today. Altmann knew better. Judaism reminds modern man of the metaphysical depth of history; that is, a sacrality inheres in the transcendent conceptions of "people" and "land." For Judaism, these conceptions are inseparably bound up with the law. This relation among the people, their land, and the law represents yet another problem; for it is not implicit in Judaism that this relation is to be realized only in a theocracy. This is not acceptable for a Jewish reality today. But what is? The working out of this relation will, as Altmann observed fifty-five years ago, keep one busy for a long time to come.

Indicative of the intellectual courage of Alexander Altmann, this orthodox rabbi and professor, was that he insisted that Israel's "historical path can not be determined theologically through a prejudging idea." Instead, in Judaism "the work of revelation is essentially uncompleted and is demanded anew historically each day. Out of this grows the historical dynamic of the labor of Jewish theology." Possibly a separation of church and state—a necessarily unstable and imprecise undertaking—is essential, not primarily for the state of Israel, but, above all, for the sake of Judaism itself.

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The Reader Replies

Merely Anecdotal

Will Aristides permit a correction on his story (I mean anecdote) about the Austrian playwright in his latest column, "Merely Anecdotal," in the Spring 1992 issue? He wasn't Austrian, he was Hungarian—Ferenc Molnár. The anecdote was told me by his widow, now deceased, Lili Darvas.

When Molnár was subpoenaed to be a witness, the word sped through Budapest and convulsed the city, because everyone knew that Molnár never rose before noon. Three or four of his cronies—no early risers themselves—arranged to wake one another on the appointed day, go to Molnár's house, wake him and get him into his clothes and out the door. It was to them that he said, "All witnesses?" when he stepped into the street.

STANLEY KAUFFMANN
New York, New York

Amadeus and Mozart

A. Peter Brown readily admitted in *"Amadeus* and Mozart" in the Winter 1992 SCHOLAR that neither Peter Shaffer nor Milos Forman "were . . . making an objective 'Life of Wolfgang Mozart' " when they produced the motion picture *Amadeus.* Why, then, does he devote his entire article to correcting the historical inaccuracies and poetic license of the film?

Dr. Brown himself also stated that "the caveats published with the stage play were never imprinted on celluloid; fiction was never segregated from truth." From this statement, I presume that his intention in writing the article was to "set the record straight" for the "larger and less-sophisticated" audience who might not have understood just what Shaffer and Forman had done in *Amadeus.*

Generally speaking, I applaud any and all efforts at correcting the errors of popular histories. In this instance, though, I feel very differently. *Amadeus* was a work of fiction that used the historical personages of Mozart and Salieri to express the views of Shaffer and Forman. As was admitted, the film was never intended as an objective biography of the composer. Rather, *Amadeus* plays out the universal drama of the difficulty in separating human beings from their works. It asks why some people are seemingly (and unjustly) favored by fate with great abilities. That, not historical accuracy, is the point of *Amadeus.* Dr. Brown's article, while well-intentioned, appears to ignore this distinction.

I am reminded of the furor over Oliver Stone's film *JFK* by *"Amadeus* and Mozart." In both instances, I believe that critics spent too much time and energy in dissecting historical minutiae. The purpose behind each film is, in my opinion, much more than historical accuracy. The real historical events had to give way to the artists' message.

Certainly, there are people among the "less-sophisticated audience" who might not recognize the subtleties involved here. I would hope that Dr. Brown would not feel that readers of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR were among this benighted group. If he does, then I think that he has underestimated the perspicacity of this journal's readers as other critics have often underestimated the sensibilities of the American public generally.

JAMES MALISZEWSKI
Baltimore, Maryland

A. PETER BROWN replies: Mr. Maliszewski accuses me of implying that the readers of this journal are among the "benighted" and "less-sophisticated." What I did say was that the film version of *Amadeus* was for a larger and therefore less-sophisticated audience than the stage play was for. He also believes that the historical Mozart is secondary to the film itself since its theme is the "universal drama of the difficulty in separating human beings from their work." While I, too, believe this to be a theme of the Shaffer/Forman film, does Mr. Maliszewski believe that a movie like *Amadeus* would have gained such attention and success if it were concerned with an almost-unknown jealous kapellmeister and one of his underlings with greater musical gifts at an obscure Bavarian court? I think not.

American History

John Lukacs's "American History: The Terminological Problem" (Winter 1992) has its heart in the right place, one supposes, but it gets its history wrong at just about every conceivable opportunity.

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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR doesn't have room for a letter detailing every howler in Lukacs's long essay, so I'll mention just two that drew a wince from this reader. One is more or less minor, the other pretty major.

The minor matter is Lukacs's curious notion that Samuel Johnson, when he denounced patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel, "meant nationalism." But "patriotism" as it occurs in Johnson's famous phrase has, of course, a meaning specific to eighteenth-century British politics: it refers to the so-called "Patriot Opposition" to Walpole associated with Bolingbroke and the Country party in the 1730s, and later to the Opposition rhetoric mobilized by Wilkes and his followers in the contest over the Middlesex election. In the specificity of its connotation it would be comparable to a modern term like "Dixiecrat," and it has, in any case, nothing whatsoever to do with nationalism.

The more major issue, major because it occurs in an essay purporting to explain American political history, is Lukacs's equally curious notion that Federalists in the period immediately after 1800 "professed to believe in the sovereignty of the people." I can imagine various ways in which one might try to wriggle off the hook after having said something this misguided, but all would consist of taking various Federalist pronouncements on the part legitimately to be played by "the people" within a Polybian balance of orders and pretending that this amounted somehow to "sovereignty." But that simply won't do: the question of whether or not "the people" were to be sovereign is precisely the issue that divided the Federalists from the Jeffersonians, and the demise of Federalism owes precisely to its having been on the losing ideological side. (Linda Kerber's fine study *Federalists in Dissent* would have been a help to Lukacs here, as would the briefest scrutiny of some Federalist writers—Fisher Ames, say, or Josiah Quincy, or Joseph Dennie.)

Enough. The moral here is that broad-gauged historical synthesis, while noble in its kind, is only as good as the historian's grasp of events at the level of their original specificity. Otherwise it's parlor history, good enough for after-dinner conversation among intelligent souls, but not for the pages of a serious journal.

WILLIAM C. DOWLING
Department of English
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey

John Lukacs's essay "American History: The Terminological Problem" was fascinating and terrifying—particularly his conclusion that National Socialism was the wave of the future.

However, I think he might have given credit to a historian who foresaw this phenomenon without the advantage of witnessing the Soviet system in ruins.

On page 488 of his *History of the World*, published in 1979, Hugh Thomas wrote: " . . . Socialist Nationalism turns out, unsurprisingly, to be very like National Socialism. So far from being defeated in 1945, a version of what would have certainly seemed before 1939 to be Fascism . . . is with us, unrecognized everywhere, the strongest political movement of the century."

THOMAS FLEMING
New York, New York

JOHN LUKACS replies: Why is Professor Dowling so angry? He claims that I got "history wrong at just about every conceivable opportunity," though he chooses to limit his strictures to two issues.

I wrote that we ought to recognize the differences between patriotism and nationalism; that the very word "nationalism" appeared in English only in 1844, which is why Dr. Johnson could not have used it. This, I think, is sensible enough; but then Dr. Dowling lets out his own howler. Johnson's famous apothegm: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel" is on page 615 of my *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (Oxford University Press edition), to which Boswell adds that Johnson meant "that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak of self-interest." Thereafter Boswell and Johnson begin to talk not at all about Bolingbroke and Wilkes—as Professor Dowling would have it—but about Burke (whom they esteem). The references to the party of English "Patriots" and "patrioticks" [*sic*], printed by Boswell in italics (and most probably thus pronounced by Johnson) occur on pages 766–7, 775, and 1132: they have nothing to do with the place and the context of Johnson's famous dictum. Now who has got history (at that, eighteenth-century English literary history) wrong?

I wrote: "Both Federalists in the period 1810–20 and the Southerners in the 1850s were a peculiarly American mix of conservatives and radicals; both of them professed to believe in the sovereignty of the people." Whenever the Federalists thought that their causes were popular—as, for example, in some of the New England states in 1812—they did not for a moment hesitate to appeal to "the people." (This inclination was not only American: after 1815 the electoral success of the French ultra-royalists made them appeal to "the people" against their liberal opponents in the Chamber.)

Professor Dowling says that this "howler" of mine is "pretty major," and that this issue is "more major." This foreign-born historian is loath to quarrel with the grammatical usage of a native American professor of English. Still: what is a "pretty major"? (A majorette?) Is there such a thing as a "more major issue"? Is it possible that among professors of English Dr. Dowling is more unique than others?

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As for Mr. Fleming, I have considerable respect for Hugh Thomas—but:

"So far as Western civilization is concerned, the main totalitarian movement of the century has been not Communism but National Socialism. This may be surprising: and yet it is true." Also: "National Socialism did not die with Hitler."

These are the first and the last sentences of an entire subchapter devoted to this argument, in a book entitled *A History of the Cold War* (pp. 270 *et seq.*; or pp. 326 *et seq.* in its paperback edition). It was published in *1961* not in 1979. It was written by (to use Mr. Fleming's words) "a historian who foresaw this phenomenon without the advantage of witnessing the Soviet system in ruins." This historian is the author of this letter.

Baron Haussmann

In his article on Haussmann, "Baron Haussmann and Modern Paris" (Winter 1992), David Jordan refers to "the coup d'état that would make him Emperor in 1851." That is not quite right. The coup d'état of December 2, 1851, and the vote later that month made Louis Napoléon Bonaparte Prince-President. As Prince-President, he had a term of ten years and wide powers rather than the four-term term—with limited powers—to which he had been elected in 1848 as first (and last) President of the Second Republic. The coup of 1851 only laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Second Empire the *next year*, on December 2, 1852.

If accents are used—and they are in the article—it is Sacré-Coeur (p. 101). Also (p. 105), it should not be "Place de la Républic" but "République." English and French ought not be mixed in the same sentence.

Finally, on page 100, it is said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was moved to the quai d'Orsay "far enough from the center of Paris to be out of the range of any street fighting." Street fighting might well take place very close to the Chamber of Deputies. In fact, it did occur in that area on February 6, 1934. Thus the statement (p. 100) that "French politics were not decided in the Paris streets for more than a century" has more than the single exception (1871) noted by the author. The riots and casualties in 1934 led to the fall of the Daladier Government and the arrival of the Doumergue Ministry of National Union.

BERNARD SINSHEIMER
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The Demons and Dr. Dawkins

David Stove has done himself and your readers a disservice by failing to accept a stubborn fact—the complete identity of copies of a gene—in his witty criticism of the works of Dr. Richard Dawkins of Oxford that appeared in the Winter 1992 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. At the center of one of Professor Stove's arguments lies his certainty that there cannot be an exact copy of anything, or more precisely, that the exact copy of anything cannot be meaningfully equated with its original. He is right to argue that the exact copy of anything that has accumulated a set of unique interactions with its environment is impossible to assemble; he is wrong to take that to mean that there cannot be an exact copy of something that is purely informational, and whose information content is totally sealed off from environmental influences; something, that is, like a gene.

Total preservation of a gene's information through any number of copying cycles, in any number of novel environments, is the prerequisite of molecular biology's astounding capacity to generate clinically relevant models. We cannot clone people, but we most definitely can clone genes, and that is where Professor Stone slips up. Consider this example from the December 12, 1991, issue of *Nature*. A group of scientists came together from Mt. Sinai Medical Center, the Japanese firm Yamanouchi Pharmaceuticals, and the NIH to create a strain of mice that is guaranteed to develop the neurological lesions seen before now only in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease. The team made these mice by taking a piece of a human gene implicated in Alzheimer's disease, making uncounted identical copies of it in a bacterium, and attaching one of those copies to the front end of another human gene, one known to be active only in neuronal cells. An exact copy of this hybrid of two human genes was then injected into the nucleus of a fertilized mouse egg. There, the new human gene inserted itself into a mouse chromosome and was exactly copied, over and over again, into every cell of the developing mouse. The newborn mouse—called transgenic because of the singular extra human hybrid gene in each of its cells—was simply left to sit around. Within a few months copies of the human gene, active in its brain, gave rise to the amyloid plaques, the neurofibrillary tangles, and the neuronal losses typical of people with Alzheimer's disease. Was there anything lost, then, in the many-billion-fold copying of this singular human gene, first in the human whose brain donated it, then in laboratory bacteria, then in the transgenic mouse's cells? I am sure that nothing was lost, and that each copy was precisely identical to a portion of the original gene.

We are not inventing anything clever when we clone genes; nature clones them at every generation of every living thing. The copies of genes passed from generation to generation are—barring mutation—absolutely identical, despite Professor Stove's strong belief to the contrary. He argues that since a copy of something is always distinguishable from

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the original, genes cannot compete against each other. Copies of one gene may survive while copies of another die out, but that, he argues, is in no way competitive, since the original genes are not affected by this result. He is wrong: when the last copy of a gene or set of genes disappears from among all living things, the information in each of those copies is lost. There is no sensible distinction to be made between the loss of any one of those copies and the loss of any other. None is more of an original than any other; they are all truly identical, and their loss to competition is a true loss.

Evolution of a new species, with the loss of another, is the result of competition among species, not individuals or their genes. However, the result of evolution—not necessarily the mechanism, for it is unknown, but certainly the result—is a competition among sets of identical copies of genes for their survival of some at the expense of other sets of identical copies of genes. In this sense all living species, and all defunct ones from which we and our fellow creatures are descended, were and remain DNA's way of making more DNA. That, I submit, is reason enough to vindicate Dawkins's notion of "selfish DNA" despite his unconnected notion of "memes."

ROBERT POLLACK
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New York, New York

The Blind Watchmaker, by Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins, is one of my favorite books. In this book and others, Dawkins argues for a certain interpretation of the results of molecular biology since the discovery of DNA. He writes, I think, intelligently, persuasively, evocatively. So I found little to agree with in David Stove's attack on Dawkins in your Winter 1992 issue, especially when Stove finds that Dawkins's books, his ideas, and by strong implication, Dawkins himself, are members "of a slum breed." If Stove can state, in print, that Dawkins's ideas are obviously nonsense, I don't mind saying that those same ideas strike me as obviously true.

What I got out of *The Blind Watchmaker* was an understanding of how the phenotype serves the genotype. Genes are the active ingredients; the rest is packaging. Living organisms are "survival vehicles" for their genes. An organism keeps its genes "alive" so that the genes may replicate themselves in the offspring of the organism. But more than mere vehicles, plants and animals are "weapons systems" for their genes, forged in an arms race with competing organisms. Over millions of years the genes of different species "compete" with each other, producing increasingly effective vehicles. Evolution pits eyes against ears, strength against speed, feathers against fur, brains against brawn. Plants compete for access to sunlight; predators compete with prey and with other predators for prey—and may the better weapons systems win.

In this description of evolution I am forced to use many quotation marks as protection from Stove's literal mind. A full half of his criticism amounts to an objection to anthropomorphizing genes. Dawkins likes to speak of "selfish genes." By this he means molecules (genes) that work, not consciously but nevertheless inexorably, to replicate themselves, even when success in this enterprise leads, as it often does, to the disappearance of other genes in the same species and sometimes to the utter extinction of another species.

To me it's not so outrageous to call this behavior "selfish," but it is too much of a stretch for Stove, who further claims that it is "impossible to benefit" a molecule. Is it so hard to imagine that a molecule benefits, in some sense, when it is allowed to survive as itself? By me, a water molecule benefits when it is protected from forces that would render it H, H, O. Of course, it's not a benefit on a par with, say, paid maternity leave.

Stove is eventually forced to acknowledge that "selfish gene" is just a figure of speech—Dawkins has said as much. So then he complains that Dawkins, by using the objectionable term, has sold more books than he deserves to, implying that the term is deliberately sensational. I find it evocative, but no more sensational than the title of Stove's own book, *The Plato Cult,* which must be the title of an exposé. But then, incredibly, Stove returns to his now-willful misconception and goes on confusing "effectively selfish" with "consciously selfish" to the very last period of his essay.

I know from personal experience that Dawkins's ideas offend many people. And so I wonder if Stove's attack, which can be fairly described as nasty, arises from wounded sensibilities. It is deflating to hear that molecular biology considers you to be a warm sack for your genes. Animals, certainly human beings, experience it differently. People don't like to be told, as they were by Carl Sagan, that they are made of "star stuff," which is a fancy name for dirt (though not necessarily clay). Many are appalled to learn that the laws of thermodynamics apply to them.

It is true that the-individual-is-nothing is a bad political tenet. But I think I see in the behavior of animals, especially in those actions directed toward ensuring survival and procreation, a certain compulsiveness, which makes it seem as though the animals are "programmed" to do those things. It is evident in the behavior of the cat that lives in our garage, who, despite being well fed by my daughters, hunts birds and mice and insects with alarming intensity. It is there too in the mindless grazing that seems to occupy completely the cows in a pasture across the road. Many animals don't do *anything* but eat and mate. Perhaps Magic Johnson can sleep with so many women because the women, perceiv-

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ing Johnson to be the victorious stag, offer him their hindquarters. Maybe not. But there is, I sense, something compulsive about my own sex drive.

All this suggests to me not that our genes control us but that they make us things that will do right by them. Genes are not in there consciously directing an animal's behavior. Rather, genes unfold into organisms that act in ways that lead to the successful replication of the genes in new members of the species. Genes that don't produce organisms with this property don't get off the ground. Life is a struggle not only against the elements, but also against other living things that would eat you, or eat what you would eat, or make it difficult for you to eat them. In this combat, plants and animals are trident and net, short sword and shield, for their genes.

WILL WARNER
Ann Arbor, Michigan

As an admirer of both David Stove and Richard Dawkins, I was dismayed by Stove's attack on Dawkins in your Winter 1992 number.

Stove regards the "selfish" gene as a tendentious metaphor which, when literalized, becomes the banality that genes replicate. Stove apparently thinks behavioral genetics sheds little light on human behavior, and is just one more form of pseudo-scientific determinism.

Stove is right that genes, lacking motives or consciousness, are not literally "selfish," and that Dawkins's title, *The Selfish Gene*, is colossally misleading. What Dawkins is saying is that those genes are selected for whose expression in the behavior of organisms raises the odds that those organisms and their near relations will reproduce. Stove is also right that "memes" is an unwarranted extension of "genes," although nothing makes truth irrelevant to their spread. (Perhaps false memes tend to be dislodged by conflicting observation.) Each reader must decide for himself how hard Dawkins rides his metaphor, but I can only report having come away from *Gene* with no doubts about its message. In my view Dawkins plays fair.

Less important than Dawkins's ipsissima dixit is his argument taken in its strongest form, and so taken it is not trivial. Stove complains that biologists make a "puzzle" of parental care and altruism, but these phenomena *are* puzzling once we reject the non-explanations of common sense ("Of course we care about our children; they're ours, after all") and theology ("We care about others because God gave us a conscience"). Genes replicate when their home organisms reproduce, and if the traits of organisms must aid or at least not impede gene replication, it is hard to see why such seemingly maladaptive impulses as altruism survive. That altruism can be shown to enhance inclusive fitness and, indeed, that evolution is better able than reason to solve "prisoner's dilemmas" about cooperation are major advances in understanding morality.

It must be stressed that genetics need not deny that there are selfless impulses, or say they are "really" selfish. Genetics does not make us "helpless puppets" of our genes, since it does not deny that our "intentions, decisions and efforts" make a difference. Even geneticists know that people eat when they become hungry, pursue goals because of ambition, and marry from a desire to marry. What genetics offers is a theory about where intentions and decisions come from. It is easy to suppose that, if A causes B, and B causes C, B somehow doesn't count and it is really A causing C. Thus, we think, if genes + environment cause decisions, and decisions cause actions, decisions must be superfluous. But this is bad reasoning. When a windstorm topples a tree that then blocks traffic, it is not "really" the wind that is blocking traffic, if this is supposed to mean that traffic would have stalled even if the tree had not fallen over. It is similarly fallacious to think that my genes, and not my gene-caused decision, led me to have children, if this is supposed to mean that I would have had children anyway, whether I had wanted them or not. We can have the cake of behavioral genetics and eat the frosting of human dignity. *Something* must cause our decisions, and at least genes are an intimate part of the decision-making self.

Stove lumps behavioral genetics with astrology, Freudianism, Marxism and theology. Yet the trouble with the latter trio is not that they posit causes of human behavior, but that they *lack* a plausible cause. Astrology is absurd because for myriad reasons the stars cannot influence human affairs. Ironically, Marxism goes wrong precisely by ignoring the biological determinants of behavior. Marxism isn't silly because it says that economics *causes* us to act as we do, but because it says that *economics* causes us to act as we do.

When Stove agrees that "the causation of many human attributes . . . is entirely or principally genetic," he has already distinguished genes from stars and infantile sexuality. He cannot just be thinking of physical attributes, since the attributes he means "cannot be significantly interfered with by . . . education and welfare money." So even he allows that the causes of "effort and decisions," the factors that, along with ability, determine educational and vocational success, lie deep in our DNA. What exactly is Stove protesting, then?

The nonexperimental nature of Dawkins's reasoning reminds Stove of the armchair deductions of philosophers. The fact is that evolutionary speculations about altruism and parental investment can be and have been subjected to quantitative test. More important, any great scientific advance sheds new light on familiar phenomena. Newton having formulated his laws in terms of instantaneous rates of change, scientists for centuries after reflexively took

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derivatives of any quantity they could get their hands on, which might also have appeared suspiciously effortless. Darwin has prompted scientists to look anew at everything in the living world as the filtrate of a testing process in which mutation proposes and selectional pressure disposes. That this perspective can explain man's higher nature without reference to a moral order is as important as Darwin's Godless explanation of apparent design.

MICHAEL LEVIN
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DAVID STOVE replies: Professor Pollack's letter is based, unfortunately, on a complete misapprehension. I do *not* think that in gene-replication the fidelity of copying is usually less than perfect.

Mr. Warner, like Dr. Dawkins himself, keeps saying that he does not believe that genes have purposes, but he also keeps saying things that imply that they do. That is, he keeps saying things he does not believe. No doubt there are some circumstances in which this is excusable. But I cannot think of any excuse for it that is available to Mr. Warner, or to Dr. Dawkins.

But Mr. Warner could also with advantage try the experiment of writing down what he believes about genes, *without* using any expression that implies that genes have purposes. If he succeeds, he will find that everything characteristic of Dawkins—such as people being "tools" that genes use for their own "ends"—has suddenly dropped out of his biology. If he fails, he will then be obliged to recognize that what he and Dr. Dawkins believe about genes *is* a demonology, or a new theology, after all. (See my article "A New Religion" in the British journal *Philosophy*, April 1992.)

I am sorry to learn that my respected friend Michael Levin is an admirer of Richard Dawkins's books. It is rather like learning that an intelligent and educated friend thinks that Mills and Boon novels are pretty good.

But then I found, to my relief, that his disagreements with me are by no means so deep or extensive after all. The acid test is Dawkins's tomfoolery about "memes"; anyone who can take *that* seriously, or cannot recognize in it an all-too-familiar type of mental debility, really is beyond hope. But Levin, it turns out, passes this test without difficulty.

His main complaint against me is that I passed silently by the theory of inclusive fitness. Well, I did. But then, that theory owes nothing to Richard Dawkins, and no one, certainly not Dawkins, would suggest that it does owe anything to him. O.K.: that is why I did not mention it.

I must admit, though, that I am far less confident than Levin is, that inclusive-fitness theory *does* explain altruism. In every exposition of that theory that I have met with, the expositor seemed to be afflicted by a profound uncertainty, as to whether he was *explaining* altruism (as another scientist might explain some undoubted fact, such as the tides), or *denying the existence of* altruism.

And it was this very ambiguity, after all, that allowed Dawkins to get his foot in the door. His idea is that while mere *organisms* do (perhaps) behave altruistically, such behavior is "really" just the realization, in flesh or fiber, of the *selfishness of genes*. And that idea had been lying just below the surface, all along, in inclusive-fitness theory. Dawkins's originality consisted merely in his seeing that there was metaphysics (and money too) to be made out of this idea.

Levin asks, "What exactly is Stove protesting, then?" Why, just a thing which, as every philosopher knows, is very common: good and innocent science being turned into bad and pernicious philosophy.

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